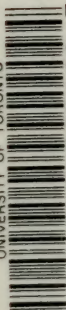


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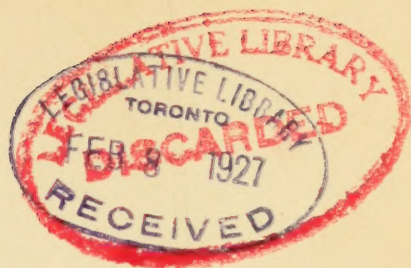
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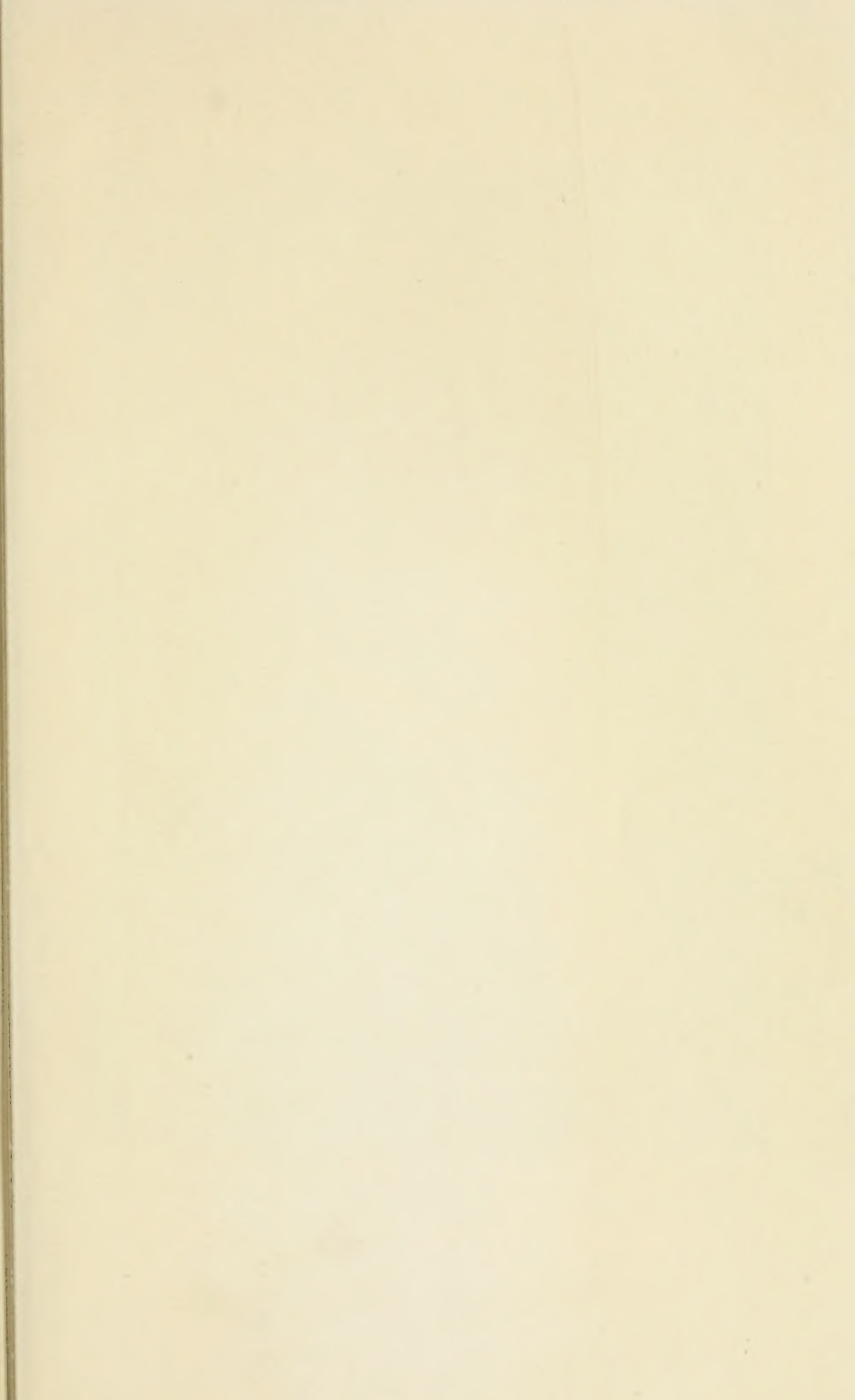
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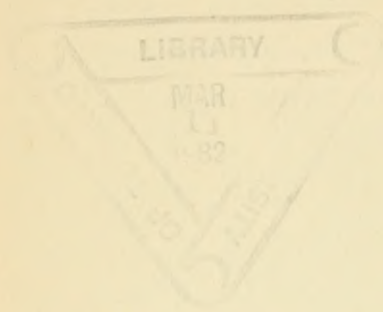
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TO
THE MOTHER WHO BORE ME
AND
THE WIFE WHO HAS BORNE WITH ME
SO LONG

IN THE MATTER OF A TITLE

THERE are three Gentlemen Adventurers on whom, when the babblers at Westminster have made the usual mess of things, the destinies of the British Empire ultimately hang. They are Sailor Jack, Tommy the Soldier, and their connecting link and very good comrade, Joe the Marine. The greatest of these is Joseph, a fact of which, being a Marine myself, I am naturally well assured. As to how he acquired his Biblical tally is a point on which I can speak with less certitude.

There is, it is true, a legend—to which, however, I attach small credence—that in the Victorian age a lady, “sitting out” at a dance, as the phrase then went, put the question to her partner, a Major in the great Sea Regiment. “The name,” he explained glibly (and, let us hope, with his tongue in his cheek) “was conferred on the Corps by that paragon of virtue, King Charles II. Now, one of His Sacred Majesty’s favourite stories was that of a lady—her married name was Potiphar—who, in her husband’s absence, gave the glad eye to the butler. But Joseph, as the fellow was called——”

“I think,” interrupted his partner, hurriedly rising, “that we had better return to the ballroom.”

On the implied libel on the handiest men in the service I refrain from comment. I have reminded you that Joseph is the *nom de guerre*, so to speak, of that historic amphibious Corps, the Royal Marines. Which is all that would seem to matter.

Now Joseph, we are told, wore a coat of many colours, Well, when one of his modern namesakes has for many years doubled the part of “Soldier an’ Sailor Too”;

has travelled widely in both hemispheres ; has addressed on a variety of topics more audiences than there are fingers on the hands of a Hindu idol ; has flattened his nose against booksellers' windows in an enraptured gaze at a row of his volumes within, and has watched his own plays from the stalls of London theatres ; has, as an entered apprentice in the arts, given an organ recital in the parish church and exhibited in a West End picture gallery—he too, perhaps, may not unfitly be described as having worn a coat of many colours. And, since in his time he has played so many parts in so many different parts of the earth, I venture to hope that the title of this book has been chosen—to quote my own family motto—*non sine causa*.

ST. GERMAN'S, CORNWALL.

1926.

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IN MANY PARTS

CHAPTER I

De Progenitoribus.

A FRIEND OF MINE, prompted, one thinks, by a very proper pride of race, recently set out to trace his pedigree. But discovering, no further back than the end of the eighteenth century, that an ancestor had been hanged for sheep-stealing, he hurriedly descended from the family tree and took up the less hazardous hobby of running whisky across the Atlantic.

I think he was mistaken. So far from desisting, the finding of this adventurous soul among my forbears would have stimulated me to proceed. His end, even the adventure which caused it, may have been regrettable; but both were unconventional and lifted him for one brief hour at least above the duller, if more respectable, dogs who doubtless barked at him from the family kennel. It is sad to reflect that it is the wicked uncle rather than the sainted aunt who has added more to the gaiety of nations.

My own family tree—a detailed tracing of which by a great-uncle (probably wicked) lies before me—differs in no material feature from a whole forest of others. It is true that I have conned it in vain for any hint of a sheep-stealer lurking among its branches; but I console myself with the reflection that on some other count doubtless more than one of my ancestors deserved hanging. The overcrowded state of England to-day is

mainly due to the fact that so many of our forbears escaped being found out. For example: Had a certain "Gentleman of Normandy"—I quote from the genealogy before me—"who came into England with Duke William, and whose name is registered on the Roll of Battle Abbey," had that gentleman, I say, been found out before he met his Norman wife, our congested population to-day would probably have been lessened by several hundred descendants of the twenty or more generations of Drurys for whom he was directly responsible. It is a solemn thought, and one on which I am prone to dwell in that chill and wakeful hour before the dawn when the vitality is notoriously at its lowest.

With that remote Norman soldier—who, for aught I know, may have been a paragon of all the virtues—I am connected by a score or so of links which stretch in an unbroken chain across the intervening gulf of 860 years. Not everyone, nor even many, can trace their descent without interruption to Norman times, and I confess to no little pride in being able to record the fact. To conceal it would be foolish affectation: the cheap democratic taunt of snobbery troubles me not at all. It is not the mere length of pedigree of which I am proud. In that respect I am in precisely the same case with my friend and contemporary the village blacksmith, who is of course descended by a similar number of generations from some Norman, Saxon or Celtic sire, who lived at the time of the Battle of Hastings. If a Saxon, he possibly lunged with his billhook at my Norman ancestor, for which act of patriotism (though somewhat late in the day) I pray for the repose of his soul. No, the main difference between my friend of the smithy and myself, genealogically speaking, is that, whereas his connecting links have been dulled and rusted by (understandable) neglect and the mists of time, mine, with the aid of wills, parish registers and the Heralds' College, have

been preserved by those who have appreciated the value of such records. And yet, had the blacksmith's family tree—to change the metaphor—been as carefully tended, I might well have had occasion to envy him its possession. For I would blithely exchange more than one of my squires and justices of the peace for an archer who had been at Agincourt or a buccaneer who had boarded a galleon with Drake.

It is only where it has chanced to be caught up in the woof of History that the pedigree of a private individual can possess the smallest interest for the general reader, and I shall confine myself to those points of contact in my own. Having presumably parried with success the billhook of the blacksmith's ancestor at Senlac, my "gentleman of Normandy" would seem to have settled down, an unwelcome cuckoo in a marauded nest, in a Saxon stronghold filched for him I doubt not by his open-handed patron the Conqueror. And here—it was at Thurston, near Bury St. Edmunds—his seven immediate descendants continued until, in the fifteenth century, the three sons of the seventh acquired respectively the East Anglian manors of Rougham, Wetherden and Hawsted, and founded three separate branches of the family.

Beyond the bald statement of their descent the records are irritatingly silent as to the lives of those early Norman forbears of mine. It irks me not to know what manner of men they were; and on wakeful nights I sometimes attempt—with the aid of such imagination and smattering of history as I possess—to spy upon the privacy of that septet of gentlemen adventurers. I see them in those troublous days of the Norman and early Plantagenet kings, successively heading forays against the still rebellious thegns, hunting the wolf and the wild boar in the surrounding forests, at meals with the ladies of the family, all eating their meat with their fingers and throwing the bones on the rush-strewn floor. Or at night in the

bare stone hall, when the smoke from the wood fire wreathes about the rafters and the arras is bellying in the draught. I see the women in their wide-sleeved gowns, their long plaits of hair, their silken girdles and embroidered shoes, listening to the wandering Saxon harpist as he sings for his supper in a language few of them as yet understand. Boarhounds, who sleep in the hall, growl over the bones in the rushes; men in loose tunics and cross-gartered stockings discuss the day's chase with Norman-French oaths, till the medley of sounds is presently stilled for the night by the ringing of curfew from Thurston Church tower.

It is not until the reign of Richard II that I can find a member of the family who actually touched History, and even he, like many a better man before his time and since, owed the distinction to his wife. This Sir William Drury of Rougham, my direct ancestor, wedded Catherine Swynford, a niece of the poet Chaucer by marriage. Did her uncle, one wonders, present her with an autographed copy of his *Canterbury Tales*, bound in sheepskin, or did he content himself (if not the lady) by writing her some long-lost ode proper to the occasion? In any case it is gratifying to think that Sir William must have proved a satisfactory experiment in matrimony. For on his death, it is interesting to note, Dame Catherine Drury lost little time in repeating the experience by becoming the third wife of John of Gaunt, "time-honoured Lancaster." Sir William, one may add, was not the only member of the family who, so to speak, touched English History by marriage. A couple of centuries later a Sir Drue Drury wedded a first cousin of Queen Anne Boleyn's, while some years afterwards a Sir Robert married Anne Bacon, granddaughter of the famous Sir Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor to James I.

But it was in "the spacious days of great Elizabeth" that the fortunes of the race, like those of many another English family, reached their zenith and thereafter

declined. Several held high office in the State : most of them, judging by their wills, could have talked on equal terms (financially at least) with the modern war profiteer in the market-place. It is another thought which troubles me in that cockerow hour to which I have referred. For if, in their estimate of men, they gave precedence (which I'll not believe) to the possessor of a Tudor Rolls-Royce (or its equivalent in coaches), their ghosts would assuredly cut their pauper descendant dead, were they by chance to meet him one moonlit night in Drury Lane.

Well, I have never met them, even in the moonlight, though I am much given to haunting that historic neighbourhood whenever I happen to be in London. There is a particular spot—the old Olympic Theatre occupied it in my boyhood—which draws me like a magnet. For there in Elizabethan days stood Drury Court, which gave its name to the Lane, and which was the town house of the family. It was on one of those pilgrimages, incidentally, that I recently witnessed at the great playhouse the well-known drama “Ned Kean of Old Drury,” a character in which is Dr. Joseph Drury, the famous Headmaster of Harrow (1785 to 1805) and a cousin of my grandfather's.

But it is Hawsted Manor in Suffolk on which my imagination chiefly dwells, though all that remain of it to-day—the house was pulled down in 1830—are the moat and the gateway pillars, the latter of which still bear the family arms. The word “Ichabod” might be fittingly added ! But if it is difficult to visualise the Normans, my Elizabethan ancestors at all events stand out from the page of History vividly enough in their doublets and trunk hose, their farthingales and ruffs, framed in the colour and pageantry of their picturesque age. For of this period of the family history there are records in abundance.

When, in 1578, Queen Elizabeth visited Hawsted Manor on one of her famous “progresses,” she caught

her first glimpse of its gables and chimneys through the quivering haze of a piping hot July day. It stood on a gentle eminence facing south, a typical country mansion of the period. It was "a fair and strong built house of brick and timber, covered with tiles, within a square moat," and the approach was by a gatehouse and bridge, near which three plane-trees had recently been planted. In later times these trees, then grown to a magnificent size, were said to be the oldest in the kingdom and to have been the gift of Sir Francis Bacon. The tradition that he introduced the plane into England, and the fact of his connection with the family by marriage, would seem to lend colour to the story.

One sees the cloud of dust that heralds the great Queen's approach, the gorgeous pageant which presently emerges from it—heralds in green, scarlet-clad yeomen of the guard, gentlemen with gilded battle-axes, men-at-arms in steel caps and corselets, brilliantly dressed courtiers, a rainbow of silk upon the winding country road. And in the midst Elizabeth, obviously proud of her newly invented coach, but bruised and shaken owing to its lack of springs, and followed by her happier Maids of Honour on horseback. I hear the great cavalcade clatter under the gatehouse and across the bridge to the Base Court beyond : the babel of tongues, the jingle of arms and bridles, the ring of spurs on the stones as the weary company dismounts. And I smile at the ill-concealed chagrin on the face of my unfortunate ancestor, who has had this honour thrust upon him, and who will have to foot most of the bill. For the daily cost of these "progresses" is roughly £110 Elizabethan money, and the expenses of the night's hospitality at least will fall on his shoulders.

Poor Sir William ! Even his wife went to bed that night the poorer by the loss of a valuable kickshaw. Leaning over the low wall after dinner to see the lilies in the moat, the Queen dropped her silver-handled fan

into the water, an accident that was tactfully repaired by the instant gift of her hostess's. One can imagine the mighty Tudor oath which followed the splash in the water, and it is gratifying to know that Harry VIII's daughter was so quickly mollified. But, since it is recorded that she received the substitute with special graciousness, and knowing what we do of Elizabeth's character, I have a shrewd suspicion that the gift was of greater value than the fan at the bottom of the moat. Lady Drury, *née* Elizabeth Stafford, had been one of the Queen's favourite Maids of Honour in her youth, and had often had her ears soundly boxed by her royal mistress. The visit to Hawsted was doubtless a tribute of affection paid "for auld lang syne." Yet I cannot but think that both Sir William and Lady Drury breathed more freely when their tempestuous guest presently departed, and the pigeons were once more cooing from the dovecotes and the rooks cawing in the elms behind the sleepy old manor house.

Did the ruinous cost of that visit leave its mark on Sir William's temper? For, ten years later in France, he was killed in a duel with another knight, who had dared to walk into a room before him. Yet, if the tangled gardens at Hawsted are haunted, I like to believe that it is the gentler spirit of his granddaughter, Mistress Elizabeth, who walks there: for she, too, in a measure, touched History.

On my cottage wall hangs her picture, which helps one to understand the almost passionate lines addressed to her—you may read them in his published works—by Dr. Donne, the Elizabethan poet and Dean of St. Paul's. She was not fifteen when she died—from a box on the ear given her, according to tradition, by her father; for a schoolgirl of that age to have roused the admiration of so grave and famous a divine she must, one thinks, have been endowed with more than ordinary intelligence and beauty. It is said on good authority that she was destined for the wife of Prince Henry,

eldest son of James I ; and as she was of an old English family and a great heiress to boot, it is not improbable that the match was approved by the canny Scots King. Her tomb is in Hawsted Church, its beautiful alabaster effigy representing her with her hand beneath her ear, an attitude supposed to indicate the manner of her death.

There is one other of my Tudor predecessors of whom I think less gently. This is the Sir Drue Drury whom I have already mentioned, and who was for some years the custodian of Mary, Queen of Scots. His office could have been no sinecure. With Elizabeth on the one hand—who would have instantly sent him to the block had his charge escaped—and the lovely but treacherous Mary on the other, he was indeed between the devil and the deep sea. But he was a fanatical Protestant (a defect less reprehensible perhaps in his day than in ours), and his intolerance of his prisoner's creed was notorious. Even when the unhappy woman stood upon the scaffold he could not refrain from hurling religious taunts at her ; and, though he lived to be nearly a hundred, I hope he was haunted to the end of his days by that February morning scene in the grey hall at Fotheringay.

With the death of little Mistress Elizabeth in 1610 the Elizabethan chapter of the family history comes to an end. Thenceforth the line upon the parchment before me runs clearly enough in unbroken succession from father to son through Stuart and Georgian times. But it is no longer interwoven with the coloured threads of History. Whether my forbears were Royalists or Roundheads, Jacobites or Hanoverians, or whether in those periods of family dissension they fought against each other, I have no sure knowledge. They appear to have declined from Tudor days into a race of respectable (and probably dull) country squires, professional men, and nondescripts vaguely described as "citizens of London." I note at random Robert, a

surgeon of Harwich under Anne; his brother, the Reverend George, a Suffolk rector of William and Mary's time, and so on. Here and there, it is true, one peeps above the shoulders of his kinsmen, such as Richard, High Sheriff of Cambridge in Charles II's reign, and Thomas, who filled the same office for Essex under the second George. There is, too, a High Court Judge. But, since he died in the Armada year, he can scarcely be said to have brightened the depressing dullness of the Caroline and Georgian epochs. And, after all, what is a Judge? Unlike my friend's enterprising ancestor of the Stolen Fleece *contretemps* (and unless the records are mistakenly reticent), not one of the family achieved even so easy a distinction as getting himself hanged.

In the centre of the public garden—formerly the churchyard—adjoining St. Luke's, Chelsea, stands a solitary headstone. Its mournful companions have long ago been removed to make room for the paths and grass plots upon which the shrewd, sharp-eyed little London children now play. The stone, conspicuous in its solitude, bears the simple legend, "Captain John Drury, Royal Marines. Born 11th July, 1784, died 21st Jan., 1847." Two privates of the Corps, on furlough from Chatham, recently stood beside it in curious speculation. "I wonder," said one of them to his comrade, as they presently turned away, "what brought one of our orf'cers 'ere!"

I have often wondered the same thing; for, though the dead Marine beneath the pavement was my grandfather, I know scarcely more of him than I do of that other soldier, the Norman who fought at Senlac. He sailed in the *Foudroyant* with Nelson; he spent the long peace after Waterloo on half-pay and—like a better known Marine, Wilkins Micawber—in waiting for something to turn up; he married an *émigrée* of the French Revolution, whom he treated badly. So much, but no more, I have gleaned from my father,

who evidently regarded Captain John as an improper person, even when dead and buried, for his grandson to know. His treatment of my French grandmother—who, in spite of it, lived to old age, and who was adored by her numerous descendants—sealed his son's lips. There were, I gather, other peccadilloes in the background. But, as my father in his Calvinistic outlook was a second Sir Drue minus the trunk hose and ruff, I have little doubt that my grandsire's sins were exaggerated.

But a brief glimpse of him in James's *Naval History* assures me that he was at least a gallant officer. A fierce action has just been fought between French and English frigates off Madagascar. Through the still lingering smoke I see a boat, manned by seven men, pulling from H.M.S. *Astraea* to take possession of the surrendered French prize *Renommée*. One of the seven is the First Lieutenant of the *Astraea*, the other of the two officers is John Drury, her subaltern of Marines. The boat has been riddled by shot and is leaking like a sieve; and, in the very act of grasping the ropes flung to them by the Frenchmen, she sinks beneath their feet. I see them clambering up the frigate's side—and the drifting smoke blots them out from further view.

My father's sword and medals—Syria, the Baltic, China—hang on the same wall with the picture of Mistress Elizabeth, and speak for themselves. He was a Victorian naval officer of the strictest integrity and of the most scrupulous honour. I hold his memory in deep affection and respect. And yet—alas for sinful human nature!—it is a reprobate beneath a London playground who grips my imagination and stirs my sympathy. The two family portraits in the long picture gallery which haunt my imagination most are those of the gentle girl lying in Hawsted Church, and the lone straggler from the Napoleonic wars stretched beneath a Chelsea garden, the laughter of children all about him in his long sleep.

CHAPTER II

The Grub.

THE LATE DR. JOSEPH MAY, of Devonport, who stage-managed my first appearance in that evergreen comedy, "The Seven Ages," had seen, when a boy, the great Napoleon on board the *Bellerophon* in Plymouth Sound. To this early, if somewhat shadowy, connection with the French nation I attribute a curious trick of the brain, which has recurred daily throughout my subsequent career. In spite of the fact that my bowing acquaintance with the French irregular verbs has never ripened into familiarity, and that more than one native of Gaul has assured me that I speak his tongue with the purest of (British) accents, I never fail, during those semi-conscious moments between sleep and wakefulness, to think in French.

It is true that, my grandmother having been a Frenchwoman—she was, as I have said, a child *émigrée* from the Revolution—heredity may be an alternative explanation. But I prefer to think that I derive my early morning fluency in French from Napoleon himself. I may add, incidentally, that I take off my hat to my late grandmother for her consideration in crossing the English Channel. For, if she hadn't, it is a thousand to one that I should have been born a Frenchman.

It could not have been very long after that obstetric visit of Dr. May's (November 8, 1861, as I am informed) that I first went afloat. It would appear that I was taken out to Plymouth Breakwater—an open-boat voyage of some four miles—where my bottle of milk

was warmed for me by kindly lighthouse keepers over their fire. I wish I could recall my impressions of that early sea adventure, for the waters of the Sound no doubt mirrored more than one ship of the old sailing Navy, whose log was a potential volume of romance. Alas! I see only a slumbering Philistine, asprawl with his bottle in the stern-sheets of the boat, contemptuously indifferent to opportunities he would now give much to possess.

A year or two afterwards my father was appointed to H.M.S. *Dauntless*, Captain von Donop, coastguard ship in the Humber, and to Hull in due course I was carried. During the next few years, the mid-'sixties, I developed from the chrysalis stage into the normal little grub in knickerbockers, and one of my earliest impressions is that of the *Dauntless*, a cloud of snow-white canvas, entering the River Humber. She was under royals and stu'n's'ls, a dream of beauty which, even to the child of six, spelt Romance. For I knew that Robinson Crusoe had hailed from Hull, and every ship I saw held for me a potential Crusoe.

It is an experience common to all that, while weighty events of yesterday are already sunk in oblivion, some triviality of childhood will stick in the memory. Why I should remember it so vividly after the passage of nearly six decades I cannot say, but one hectic afternoon in the year of grace 1868 shines out through the mists of time like a policeman's bull's-eye in a fog. And in the simile perhaps lies the clue to that trick of the brain, for I think it is a matter of conscience.

Invited, in the temporary absence of his parents, to spend a few hours with the Captain's son Stanley—a youth I visualise in a black velvet knickerbocker suit—we were (somewhat imprudently, one thinks) left for a long afternoon to our own devices. To the complete happiness of urchins of our age some form of mischief was essential, and the inventive brain of my host was not long in finding it. All the talk around

us was of the war we were then waging against Abyssinia ; what more likely, in that land of make-believe in which childhood dwells, than a landing of King Theodore and his dusky hordes at Hull ? The house must needs be put in a state of defence, and the first step to that end was obvious. With spades purloined from the tool-shed we got to work on that holy ground of the 'sixties, the croquet lawn, and drove a shallow trench across it of which neither of us, I think, would have been ashamed in his subsequent professional career. For that first brilliant essay of ours in field fortification—which, incidentally, left our elders quite cold and resulted in the guest returning home under a cloud—was prophetic. We both became soldiers, the boy in the black velvet knickerbockers being to-day Major-General Sir Stanley Von Donop, K.C.B., a recent Master-General of the Ordnance and Military Member of the Army Council.

My father's next appointment was to the *Royal Adelaide*, port guardship at Plymouth, and thither in the same year we returned. Ever since then the western naval port has been the geographical pivot round which my long vagabondage *per mare, per terram* has revolved. But I trust Plymouth will not forget that a similar distinction was once conferred on her by a person called Drake.

I recall a memorable visit with my father in the summer, I think, of 1870 to the ill-fated turret-ship *Captain*, then lying in the basin at Keyham. She was, I believe, one of our first "low-freeboard" ironclads, a type in which the bulwarks of tradition were scrapped in order to afford the revolving guns amidships a clear field of fire. In any seaway, consequently, the water washed to and fro without let or hindrance across her upper deck, the whole business constituting a heresy in shipbuilding which brought sailors of the old school to the verge of apoplexy whenever they contemplated it. Yet it was their bigotry, not the ship's design,

which presently sent her to the bottom. More than twenty years later, as will appear, I myself served in a low-freeboard man-of-war, and, in spite of many a gale of wind, am still alive to tell the tale. The type of course became common enough, and indeed there is a special element of safety in such a vessel. The trouble with the *Captain* was that the Sinbads of the Navy then in office lacked the imagination to visualise a ship without sail power. So to sea the *Captain* went, with a press of canvas which, applied to so unbouyant a weight of metal, proved her undoing. As all the world knows, one wild September night in the same year she capsized off Cape Finisterre, carrying all but a handful of her complement with her to the bottom. Many a time since I have thought of the cheery crowd of midshipmen who were drowned that night, and who, in their gunroom a few months before, had been kind to a small and very shy boy of nine.

I first acquired the rudiments of grammar—Latin, that is, for in the matter of English grammar my Victorian contemporaries and I are, so to speak, self-made men—at Sir Anthony Browne's ancient school at Brentwood, in Essex. It was founded in the reign of the lady pleasantly known to posterity as "Bloody Mary," and a reminder of her monomania for roasting those of her subjects who did not share her religious beliefs still stands before the old buildings in the form of the Martyrs' Oak. The school celebrated its 350th anniversary on Speech Day some twenty years ago, when Sir Neville Chamberlain, a distinguished old boy, gave away the prizes. He and I were contemporaries at Brentwood, though, as he was in the august sixth and I was a lower first form boy, the only occasion he would have had to address me would have been to order me out of his path. Yet I, too, had he but known it, was destined in the dim future to play the principal rôle on Speech Day. For, a few years ago, half a century to a day after I had left it as a very small boy, I

journeyed to Brentwood at the invitation of the Governors and addressed my old school. The Latin oration in which the captain of the school welcomed me gave me a temperature which only fell again to normal when I discovered that I was not expected to reply in the same tongue.

Two other notable Brentwood boys, long before my time, were Captain Hedley Vicars—described in the *Biographical Dictionary* (somewhat smugly, one thinks) as “Crimean hero and Christian soldier”—and Sir Herbert Oakley, the famous organist and composer. All our names are enshrined in the school song—I blush each time I hear myself in such august company—and some of them are still to be seen carved on the ancient desks. I saw mine there exactly fifty years after I was caned for cutting it!

There was one other boy at Brentwood who so impressed himself on my memory that I have dedicated one of my books to him in the following words: “*To the Boy of the Unremembered Name who, upon a summer’s afternoon some decades since, fought with me (a novice in the art) behind the chapel of the ancient School at Brentwood, and who, by a well-directed blow upon my chin, first gave me furiously to think.*”

I have always regretted that ill-health cut short my career at Brentwood, and I still retain my early veneration for the antiquity and traditions of the school. The six years’ climb, too, in its wholesome atmosphere to the dizzy heights, from which a haughty and studiously gruff adolescence exacted the obeisance of my fellow worms and myself, would have been better for my soul than the somewhat desultory tuition which followed. But residence beneath the eye of the Napoleonic Dr. May’s successor was deemed advisable, and I was sent accordingly to a private school in his neighbourhood.

My instant conviction of its presiding pedagogue’s unfitness for the scholastic calling has not been modified

by the passage of time. He may have been an admirable priest; he would certainly have made a joyous corrector of heretics under the Inquisition. But, as I still see him, he was vindictive and unjust (unforgiveable defects in the code of the average schoolboy), and was a man of violent likes and dislikes. Since I was *facile princeps* in the latter category, however, it is only fair to admit that my judgment may be slightly jaundiced, and I have no desire to exaggerate the failings of one who has long crossed the Styx. Of his abortive attempts to bowl my shins at cricket instead of the wooden stumps I can write with greater assurance, for, if the experience engendered in my breast a lasting distaste for the game, it developed a dexterity in dodging missiles which I have found useful at more than one political meeting in later life.

Greek must have been an unpopular tongue with my contemporaries and their parents, for only two boys, of whom I was one, suffered the misery of construing Xenophon and the Greek Testament to an accompaniment of withering sarcasm from our reverend mentor. As my fellow classic, Chapple, was deservedly one of his favourite pupils, most of the sarcasm—equally deservedly, no doubt—came my way, and presently I had to endure the whole of it. For, leaving me to plough my lonely furrow through the *Anabasis*, Chapple passed into the Royal Navy, and within a few months was in the historic action between H.M.S. *Shah* and the Peruvian turret-ship *Huascar*. It would interest me to learn whether he cultivated his early facility in Greek, for he became no less a man than Paymaster Rear-Admiral Sir John Chapple, K.C.B., C.V.O., Deputy Keeper of the King's Privy Purse.¹

My last school was Plymouth College, where I was one of the handful of boys with which it opened in

¹ Since writing the above I have read with regret *The Times* announcement of my old schoolfellow's death at Windsor on March 5, 1925.

September 1877, under the head mastership of the late G. L. Bennett, a former master at Rugby. There are many of his pupils still in the town, and I am confident that they will all agree with me that we owe his memory a deep debt of gratitude. He possessed a magnetic personality, the gift of imagination, and a keen sense of humour—a combination which, added to high scholarly attainments, made him an ideal school-master. What he didn't know about the human boy wasn't worth knowing, and I think we all sorrowfully recognised the fact. He was fond of setting us the most unexpected passages of English prose to turn into Latin in school and without the aid of a dictionary. One such exercise especially sticks in my memory. It ran: "Betsy Prig was a one-eyed washerwoman, the loss of whose other orb was commonly attributed to a too frequent indulgence in alcoholic liquor." Any-one who has read Virgil and Cicero will appreciate the humour of translating Dickens into the tongue of those stately classics!

Many years later my two brothers and I, chancing to forgather in London, made a pilgrimage to Sutton Valance in Kent, to which school our old head master had meanwhile been transferred. I am afraid that in the far-off days at Plymouth we had all three caused him worry enough for remembrance. For, on expressing the fear that he might have forgotten us in the long interval, he replied with one of his cheery laughs, "Forgotten you? My dear fellows, I should have recognised your skins if I had seen them hanging out on the hedge to dry!"

I am afraid my school career was not a brilliant one, for the only prize I ever handled was supposed to have been awarded me for the theory of music. My uneasy suspicions that all was not right were aroused by the title of the volume, which was *Creasy's Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*, a work that did not seem to have any particular bearing on music. My doubts were

confirmed, however, when it was subsequently discovered that I had been awarded another fellow's history prize in error, and that my original views on the theory of music had left the examiners quite cold. I should add that G. L. Bennett was so impressed by the fact that I had even handled a prize that he paid for another copy out of his own pocket, and requested me to keep it as a mark of his esteem.

Whether it was the subsequent perusal of this spurious music prize, or a course of Marryat's novels, or heredity, which lured me to the sea and to the profession of arms I cannot say. The immediate result, however, was another surprise for G. L. Bennett. For when, contrary to his emphatic prediction, I succeeded in passing the entrance examination for Sandhurst, he received such a shock that he gave the school a half-holiday, and was seen no more till the following morning.

CHAPTER III

Réveillé !

A CONSTITUTIONAL INDOLENCE has safeguarded me all my life from essaying that peculiarly fatuous form of arson known as "setting the Thames on fire"; and, if there is a time when I am least prone to try, it is on first awaking in the morning. The early Christian maid who lights the kitchen fire is a martyr to her duty and compels my admiration; the braggart, who assures me that of his own free will he rises with the lark and does his best work before breakfast, merely rouses my suspicion. A pricking conscience which habitually banishes sleep at dawn scarcely suggests the flower of a blameless life, and I (metaphorically) smite my breast and thank Heaven that I am not, in that respect at least, as other men are. For, provided I am left undisturbed, I seldom have the smallest difficulty in sleeping the clock round.

It is for this reason I have so rarely heard the First Trump of the military day—that sleep-shattering blare of bugles referred to by the British soldier, with a fine contempt for foreign tongues and with the usual lurid adjective in his own, as "Revelly." I could probably number on my fingers the occasions on which it has reached my ears, and most of those I think have been funerals. But there was one October dawn at Chatham in the year of grace 1880 when its brazen clamour stirred my soul to its depths, for it was the first time I listened to it as a soldier.

Across the gulf of forty-five years I recall that

awakening more clearly even than yesterday's. I had joined on the previous evening, my extremely youthful appearance impelling the subaltern of the day, whom I first encountered, to express the polite hope that I had left my mamma quite well. My fingers, it is true, were still cramped with scribbling school impositions; but that pæan of martial music beneath my window in the dawn seemed to shout the reminder that the schoolboy was now a Queen's officer, with a potential field-marshal's baton in the japanned case under his bed. Ah well! If the baton has not materialised, it is something perhaps that the sexagenarian's dreams are still very largely those of the schoolboy.

Before I went to bed that first day of my professional career I had been shown for the good of my soul how contemptibly insignificant a cog I was in the great military machine. It was a gospel everyone seemed to have a mission to teach me, the most zealous of the missionaries being the subalterns of the previous batch, seasoned veterans of six months' service. It was they who instructed me—with a solicitude I should have suspected—in the ritual of reporting myself to the Commandant: and it was not until that Dundreary-whiskered martinet of Crimean days had icily inquired as to the whereabouts of my sword, and I had smilingly assured him that it was quite safe in my quarters, that I realised I had outraged one of the most sacred canons of military etiquette. The basilisk glare and sudden roar, which sent me leaping across the parade in quest of my lightly discarded weapon, haunt me in my dreams to the present day.

Being the junior of the latest batch of recruits, thirteen in number, and consequently the last of the 260 officers then on the muster roll of the Corps, I filled for the next six months the humble position of Boots. My brother subalterns of the batch were at special pains to prevent my forgetting it, and I was nicknamed "Amen," as being the last word in the

Service. Yet, if a little sadly, I can smile at them now ; for, in spite of my unlucky number, I am one of the very few survivors of those light-hearted lads who first gathered round the mess-table forty-five years ago.

I suppose it was with a view to emphasising our lowly position at the foot of the military ladder that we were made to don the red kersey and glengarry cap then worn by the private, and to spend the long drill hours of that winter shoulder to shoulder with him in the ranks. It was a salutary comradeship for all of us, and one which, in my case at least, had far-reaching effects. For there is at Plymouth to-day an esteemed friend of mine, a portly bald-headed butler, who, whenever I chance to come within the scope of his professional ministrations, sees to it that *my* glass at all events never stands empty. It was not for nothing that I learned the "goose-step" in the same squad with an embryo butler.

From time immemorial the Sea Regiment has been famed for its iron discipline and the thoroughness of its training. The winter of 1880 was a snowy one ; but, snow or not, we were on parade at a shiveringly Spartan hour, and woe betide the sybarite who was late ! Nor was there any latter-day elasticity about the word. To reach the parade even while the strokes of the barrack clock were still echoing was accounted unpunctuality, and drew forth hectic comment from the Adjutant. A second offence resulted in one of those interviews with Dundreary Whiskers which filled five minutes of the wintry day with tropical summer.

A variety of influences play their part in the making of the British subaltern—regimental tradition, the tone of the mess, the standard of achievement set by the commanding officer. But it is by the hands of that master craftsman in soldiery, the Adjutant, that the raw material is mainly moulded, and his fingers may well prove either too forceful or too lax. In our case we were notably fortunate : Howard Stanley Thompson—

a subaltern like ourselves, but with a dozen years' service behind him—knew perfectly how to blend the *suaviter in modo* with the *fortiter in re*. On parade he was the strictest of martinets; elsewhere he was the big brother of the batch of yesterday's schoolboys committed to his charge. At forgatherings in his quarters there was no more delightful host; from his stories we gathered much useful regimental lore, while his skill as a pianist—he had been a pupil of Dr. Monk, the famous organist and musical compiler of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*—was not the least of the evening's attractions. On the principle that a man should be tried by his peers, he would (unofficially) leave the punishment of minor breaches of discipline in the hands of the subalterns themselves; and, since we were on our honour to discountenance bullying, this mock court-martial system worked extremely well. The culprit, it is true, might carry for some hours afterwards a red mark or two on a concealed portion of his anatomy; but it was obviously preferable to a permanent black mark at the Admiralty, which might conceivably prejudice his career even in a remote and regenerate future.

But it was not only from the Adjutant that we absorbed that pride of Regiment which, half smothered by a hundred traditional grievances, still smoulders beneath the tunic of the Marine. The red brick Georgian barracks, mellowed by time—they date from 1779—and softened by the river mists, breathed an atmosphere of romance that could scarcely fail to be felt by the lad possessed of a spark of imagination or a grain of the historic sense. To turn out the guard on a winter's night may have been a duty on which one embarked (in the hearing of the Mess) with the muffled profanity proper to the occasion. Secretly that nocturnal traverse of the parade was for me something of an adventure. For when, save for the distant glimmer of the guard-room lantern, the barracks were wrapped in darkness, when even the sound of one's own footsteps were

stilled upon the snow, it seemed easy to catch the stir of arms and accoutrements all about one, even to see the white crossbelts and breeches of detachments mustering for Bunker's Hill, St. Vincent, or Trafalgar.

And the messroom ! Even to this day I never enter it, or its counterpart at Portsmouth or at Plymouth, without a catch in the throat or a plucking at the heartstrings. For in it are enshrined the Colours, those silken emblems of the Regiment's soul, while a hundred relics on the walls and table epitomise its history. The stately time-honoured chamber is approached with due decorum ; in spite of the laughter with which it may echo nightly, it is sacrosanct, and the jest must be seemly. Within its precincts a ritual, if largely negative in character, is jealously observed. One may not enter it in slovenly attire, or with one's hat on ; to draw one's sword therein would be accounted scarcely less sacrilegious than to brandish the naked blade in the presence of the King himself at Court. Many of my first impressions as a soldier have been rubbed thin by the thumb of Time : those of my first night at Mess remain as clear cut on the tablets of my memory as though they were engraved but yesterday. The two long lines of scarlet jackets, then heavily braided with gold ; the faded red of our predecessors' portraits on the walls ; the mingled reflections of both on the dark surface of a table polished by generations of fatiguemen to the clearness of glass. I see the full-length painting—a reputed Lawrence—of William IV, the gift of that sailor King and General of Marines to his loyal subjects and comrades ; the Colours draped on either side ; the golden eagle perched above a window, a capture from the French ; the framed contemporary copy of Charles II's Order in Council of October 28, 1664, the birth certificate of the Corps. What fitter nursery for sea whelps could be devised than this historic room, before whose windows the Medway shipping pass like pictures on a screen ?

Although in drill hours, as I have said, we donned the kersey and glengarry of the private, when on regimental duty or in the Mess we wore the uniform of our rank. The flat-peaked "cheese-cutter" forage cap, depicted by Charles Keene in back numbers of *Punch*, was still in use, though obsolete; and on our unoffending heads descended the first specimens of its hideous successor. It resembled an inverted scarlet-bound collar-box with, by way of peak, a gold-edged scoop attached. Yet it carried its compensations. Since the naval officer of the period had to wait till middle age for his "brass hat," the sudden flaunting of that distinction by every young subaltern in the Fleet caused an outburst of sea profanity which, I fear, we were at no pains to assuage.

A less disturbing feature was the dark-braided patrol jacket worn with it, a garment whose tangle of loops and frogs indifferently camouflaged the feminine hooks and eyes which secretly held it together. At church parade we jammed our skulls into the suggestively Teutonic helmet which had lately superseded the shako, and burst forth in all the scarlet and golden glory of the tunic. My first appearance in the latter caused a stir a *débutante* would have envied. For, with an artistic licence that scorned the cramping style of the dress regulations, the sartorial genius who created the garment had blazoned it with the insignia of a Lieutenant-Colonel's rank, thereby anticipating that exalted estate for me by five-and-thirty years. The violent contrast between the crowned constellation on my collar and the cherubic face above it, convulsed with unseemly mirth and seriously hindered the devotions of some three or four hundred officers and men.

Modest as it is, the present scale of officers' pay would have seemed princely to me forty-five years ago. It was a generally accepted axiom that it was impossible, for a subaltern at all events, to live in the Army without private means; the expenses of a regimental Mess, the

maintenance of uniform and status, were so inadequately met by the "monthly insult" received from the Paymaster. Yet for three years I contrived with more or less success to uphold the dignity of the Queen's commission on 5s. 3d. a day. I record the fact in no vaunting spirit. My own contemporaries would not believe it, nor do I blame their scepticism, for the thing was not easy to compass, Heaven knows! I was helped by no allowance from home, for the simple reason that my father, as a retired naval officer with a large family to provide for, could not afford to give me one. It was a case of "needs must when the devil drives," and he drove—devilish hard. Most of my pittance was swallowed up in Mess subscriptions; on the meagre remnant I had to live and clothe myself. The Mess dinner, a compulsory charge whether one ate it or not, was 2s.; cold breakfast—I seldom dared touch a hot dish even on the wintriest morning—was 8d.; lunch—bread and cheese obtained from the canteen—I wolfed in my own quarters, and I say "wolfed" advisedly, for I was still a growing lad, and the training I was undergoing was a strenuous one. Beyond a rare tankard of ale at dinner and a single glass of wine in which to drink the Queen's health on guest nights, no fanatical pussyfoot could have been more abstemious. I neither smoked, played billiards, nor went to the theatre, not because I was a prig, but because I was a pauper. Yet on the whole I think the experience was useful, and I can at least appreciate the humour of having to contribute in my old age towards the cigarettes, chocolates, and cinema tickets of a work-shy, dole-pampered proletariat.

It was about this time, October 1880, that we were startled by a mysterious murder in our midst, a murder which remains a mystery to this day.

A young officer of the Royal Engineers, Roper by name, left the messroom after dinner one night to finish in his quarters a letter for the evening post.

Shortly afterwards he was found on the staircase shot through the heart, a poker clenched in his hand. The revolver had been fired at such close range that his mess-jacket was scorched by the flash; his room had been ransacked, though nothing was missing; the ink on the half-written letter was scarcely dry. In the absence of the revolver the theory of suicide was untenable. Yet the police failed to find the slightest clue, and neither the murderer nor his motive was ever discovered. I was present at the inquest and attended the funeral on duty, and it was long before the impression of the sinister event faded from my mind.

Throughout that winter, a severe one, our noses were kept to the grindstone—or, what is more literally true, our numbed hands to the rifle-butt and sword-hilt. We learned in turn the use and exercise of most of the weapons of the day—the Martini-Henri with its long three-grooved bayonet, the heavy Service revolver, the naval cutlass, the infantry and cavalry sword, even the lance. Instruction in the last-named was, I think, voluntary, and, if it did nothing else, it at least gave occasion to the buffoon to spread himself on the moth-eaten witticism of Horse Marines. Concurrently with an early morning course in the gymnasium we passed from squad to company, till, with battalion drill on the Lines, Pelion was piled on Ossa, and we reached the summit of our parade training.

The course which followed on its heels gave us our first whiff of the sea, at any rate of new rope and tar. At each of the three headquarters of the Sea Regiment—Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth—is a group of wooden sheds, which suggest stranded hulks, and which are known as the Gun Battery. The interior of each represents the deck of a ship furnished with the armament of the period; and, since the fashion in guns is only a degree less capricious than that in ladies' hats, the "stock" in the battery seems to change as fre-

quently as that in a milliner's window. In this ordered pandemonium of clanging metal and strident cries we spent the next three months of our bright young lives.

The guns with which it was provided in the winter of 1880-81 were little removed in pattern from those of Nelson's day. It is true that they were rifled and that they fired a studded projectile in place of the old round shot. But they were all muzzle-loaders, were manipulated with handspikes, and the recoil was taken by a hempen breeching. Although the conical projectile with its spiral flight would probably have worried him, my grandfather of *Foudroyant* memory would have been perfectly familiar with these formidable Victorian weapons and their drill. In addition to this drill we were initiated into the sea mysteries of knotting and splicing, lashing and slinging hammocks; and a series of demonstrations with explosives, in which no one, mercifully, was blown up, brought us to the inevitable searching examination and—for those who passed it—the end of the course.

An incident connected with the Gun Battery still amuses me when I recall it. Shortly after we had returned to parade drills a regimental order was published to the effect that, if there were no officer undergoing the gunnery course, the men were to be marched to and from the battery (situated on a neighbouring hill) by the subaltern of the day. The first officer affected by this order promptly forgot it, with the result that the lynx-eyed Adjutant, noting a gun-drill party quitting barracks under the command of a lance-corporal, reported the absent subaltern for dereliction of duty. The latter was ordered to furnish the Commandant with his reasons in writing, and half a dozen of us assembled to help him compose them. I fear that in the multitude of counsellors there was less wisdom than wit, and the letter was proceeding hilariously when one of us chanced to look out of the window which commanded the parade.

"Hullo!" he mused, "what party is that just coming into barracks?"

We all looked up. The square echoed with vocal thunder; the lance-corporal in charge, bursting with self-importance, might have been Boanerges himself advertising his fitness for command. No one within a mile could have failed to notice that officerless party's return, and the Commandant, his whiskers bristling with fury, was standing on the parade not twenty yards away!

"Twice in the same morning," commented a Job's comforter; "you'd better write home, while you are about it, and tell them to expect you."

With a weary sigh, and in anticipation of a second demand on his powers of invention, the victim of a defective memory re-dipped his pen in the ink and added the following postscript to the letter before him:

"I have further the honour to state that the reason I omitted to march the gun-drill party down was that, at the time, I was engaged in giving my reasons in writing for not having marched them up."

It is sad to relate that the successive results of this enforced correspondence with his commanding officer were: (a) Arrest; (b) Reported to the Admiralty; (c) Severely reprimanded; (d) Refusal of application for Christmas leave. Alas! the lack of a sense of humour in the Tin Gods who rule his destiny is not the least of the many tragedies which chequer the path of that joyous soul, the British subaltern.

CHAPTER IV

Of Certain "Proceedings."

PERHAPS ONE OF THE BEST INSTANCES of the superiority of official English over that of Shakespeare is the elimination from the former of the vulgar verb *to go*. "Your obedient Servant" (as, with his tongue in his cheek, he loves to style himself), transmitting the decrees of the High Gods from Whitehall, would shudder at the bare thought of bidding you "go" from one post to another, even though they be no more than a hundred yards apart. It simply is not done. It is the inherited tradition of the most remote orderly-room in the Empire that you can only "proceed" on the Sovereign's business. You never, for instance, go for a holiday: you "proceed on leave of absence." Officially the Admiral can no more go to sea with his fleet than the private with his kitbag can go from one garrison to another: *per mare, per terram* each proceeds to his ordered destination. I have been told by more than one irascible superior (doubtless with justification) to go to blazes. Had the order reached me in writing via the orderly-room, it is morally certain that I should have found myself directed "to proceed forthwith to the devil."

On our release from the Gun Battery, those of us (three) who were not "spun" found ourselves detailed in orders to "proceed by route march to Milton Barracks, Gravesend," for a recruit course of musketry on the ranges; and thither one bright spring afternoon in 1881 we set forth. The party consisted of our three

selves and some forty rank and file, and it was commanded of course by the senior of the three subalterns. This youth, whom—at the risk of identification by experts in decoding cipher—I will camouflage under the name of Nostaw, was a frequenter of semi-religious bun-worries at the Soldiers' Institute, a moralist compared with whom Joseph and St. Anthony were Lotharios, and a budding Pecksniff with uplifted hands in a world of schoolboy Don Juans, whose conduct, to be fair, was less reprehensible than their conversation.

As in the days of the prophet Nahum, wherever they journeyed the Victorian "valiant men went in scarlet," and their progress through the streets was a pageant that arrested attention. Instead of leading his command, as was the custom of earlier times and is again the custom to-day, the egregious Nostaw marched, as directed by the drill book, on its flank upon the footway, a detached position which raised him several inches above the rest of us, and lent him a prominence he was presently destined to deplore.

It was half-way up Strood Hill that Destiny, in the form of a bedizened Delilah of the pavement, confronted him with outstretched arms and a smile of obviously Bacchanalian origin. He tried to dodge her; but she was a lady of generous proportions, and, like Apollyon, she "straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way." Indeed, his helmet and drawn sword, combined with the evilly handsome face of his opponent, forcibly suggested a burlesque version of Bunyan's immortal encounter. But in this case, alas! the fortunes of the combat were reversed; for, suddenly flinging her arms round the scandalised Bayard—whose scarlet face by this time matched the hue of his tunic—she loudly called on the bystanders to witness that she had at last found the long-lost husband who had basely deserted her!

The hilarious enjoyment of the episode by civilians and soldiery alike must have been audible in Rochester;

and we had left Gadshill, with its memories of Dickens, and the old Falstaff Inn far behind us before officers and men had mopped the last tears of laughter from their faces. Nostaw's military career was brief, and I believe he eventually discarded it to obey a call to labour in the more congenial atmosphere (and among the less tempestuous petticoats) of the Church. I wonder whether, when preaching on the pride which courts a fall, he ever illustrates his homily by a relation of the Nemesis which, in the days of his youth, gave *him* a fall one April afternoon on Strood Hill.

The Martini-Henri rifle, which was to bruise our shoulders with its violent recoil for the next few weeks to come, and which continued to be the firearm of the British infantry till the end of the century, was a sort of mechanical Cleopatra, whose infinite variety neither custom could stale nor age wither. That, at all events, was the impression produced in my mind on my first bowing acquaintance with the weapon; for, though I would have readily sworn in any witness-box without fear of perjury that my sights were always on the bull, the result of pressing the trigger was usually an added furrow in the landscape at some point surprisingly remote from the target. Yet, in fairness to M. Martini-Henri, it must not be supposed that my bullet *never* scored even a bull's-eye itself. That is where the disconcerting and very feminine uncertainty of the rifle came in: one never knew—I at least never knew—what one was going to hit next. Even my instructors must have realised this unreliability of the weapon; for whether I achieved an outer, or a magpie, or an inner—above all, the elusive bull—the non-commissioned expert at my elbow unhesitatingly affirmed it to be a fluke.

And yet, in spite of its vagaries (in my hands at all events), I still retain a lingering regard for the old Martini-Henri rifle, and chiefly, I think, because of the comparative simplicity of its mechanism. We had,

of course, to pull to pieces, replace, and memorise the many parts of the jigsaw puzzle concealed in its breech-block, and—with the exception of that of the organ, perhaps—mechanism of any kind frets my very un-mechanical mind. The rifle had to be reloaded after every shot, the breech being opened and closed by means of a looped lever beneath the stock. This contrivance was probably the cause of more profanity in the British Army even than the pipeclay then in use; for, since the empty cartridge-case was constantly jamming in the breech, one's thumb soon ached with the repeated strain of jerking the lever loop in an effort to eject the case. This defect of the weapon was exasperating enough on the ranges; in times of crisis on active service it doubtless cost more than one man his life. Anyhow, the Martini-Henri rifle has been obsolete these five-and-twenty years, and its epitaph may well be *Requiescat*! For it admirably served its country in the many campaigns which occurred during its quarter of a century's existence, though the long, three-grooved bayonet affixed to it was, in view of the terrible wound it inflicted, a disgrace to civilised humanity.

For many years a rusted, battered Martini-Henri rifle was one of my most treasured possessions. It had been recovered from the sunken wreck of H.M.S. *Eurydice*, a training frigate which capsized, with the loss of all but three hands, in a snow squall off the Isle of Wight in the 'seventies. I remember the disaster well, the blizzard which caused it, the national mourning for that shipful of eager young life cut off on the threshold of manhood and almost in sight of the home port. By means of the number, still legible upon the butt, I traced the name of the Marine to whom the rifle had been issued, and had it inscribed on the weapon. I used to picture him that fatal afternoon, oiling and polishing the latter in readiness for his return to the barracks he was destined never to

see again. For he and all his comrades were drowned ; the rifle—the results of his labour thereon indelibly effaced by the marks of a great sea tragedy—alone reached its destination.

The truth of the Babu's definition of life as "one dam' thing after another" was now beginning to dawn on those of us who had fondly figured the profession of arms as a pageant, in which purple patches of work were made tolerable by the attractions of a mess and the weekly recurrence of guest night. We had now completed a strenuous half-year of small-arm and infantry drills, of gymnastics, gunnery and musketry ; and the disillusioned were sadly realising that there was far less pageant than purple patch in their rashly adopted calling. For, in truth, we had barely learned the alphabet of the profession : the whole military syntax still lay before us, and, on our return to Chatham, we found ourselves detailed in orders to "proceed" to Eastney Barracks, Portsmouth, the headquarters of the Royal Marine Artillery, for a six months' course of instruction in field fortification, minor tactics, topography and military law.

Our sojourn in the great southern port and garrison was uneventful—indeed, we were kept far too hard at work to have either the leisure or the inclination to seek adventure. On one occasion, nevertheless, it sought us—five of us, that is to say—and came within an ace of terminating our bright young lives.

One night, while we were at dinner, a message reached Major Poore, of the R.M.A., an equerry to a Royal Personage then at Osborne, that his services were required immediately. But it is one thing to command, another to obey. The last steamer had already left Portsmouth for Ryde ; no other means of reaching the island that night jumped to the eye. Yet the summons was urgent, and R.P.'s, in common with inferior clay, are sometimes impatient of obstacles to their desires.

Then one of the batch under instruction had a brain-wave : why not man the four-oared skiff belonging to the Mess, and pull the Major across the Solent ourselves ? At first, it is true, the suggestion left the Major noticeably cold : he knew the fickle sea, which we most certainly did not ; the prospect, even on a reasonably fine night, of an eight-mile pull out to Spithead in a frail boat manned by boys (and raw sea material at that) did not appeal to his imagination. Still, it was the one alternative to confessing himself beaten, and in the end the six of us pushed off from Eastney beach and headed for the distant lights of Ryde.

All went well until we were within a mile or so of the pier, when the wind began to rise and the sea to roughen. By the time we had reached the pier-head and landed our grateful passenger, we were all drenched with spray and there was not a dry plank in the boat. That of course was a trifle, yet one which would have given pause to older and more experienced men. The wind and sea were rapidly increasing, and we should undoubtedly have remained for the night on the island. At the worst we could have spent it by some inn kitchen fire, though I am sure the Royal Personage, in gracious recognition of our services, would have seen to it that we were properly housed and entertained.

Had we known Spithead then as most of us were destined to know it later, I do not think that one of us would have faced that eight-mile return pull through the darkness and weather to the mainland. We had at least sufficient sense to abandon our original purpose of spending an hour in the town. All that now concerned us was to get back while it was still possible ; so, after a brief rest, we cast off from the pier, and, with the pluck of ignorance and light-heartedness of youth, pulled out into the night.

By this time the weather was atrocious. The night was dark, and a sea was running on the Spit which would have been unpleasant enough in a Service pinnace.

And we five were in a skiff, which lay so low in the water that she constantly scooped it inboard as though she were a ladle and the sea a soup tureen. Looking back, it seems a miracle that we were not swamped in the first mile ; as it was, the boat had to be baled out continuously, and since I was steering, and none of the others dared stop rowing, that back-breaking task devolved on me. And I think that, combined with my efforts to keep the boat on her course and dodge the leaping seas, it taxed my strength as severely as though I had been one of my brother officers tugging at an oar.

How long we were battling in the dark through that tumbling swirl of waters I do not remember. I know that wind, tide, and the perpetual yawing to escape the break of the combing seas drove us far off our course. I recall, too, the sudden loom of a ship's hull, the hail of the watch inquiring whether we needed help, our reply in the negative, the faint cheer which was so ill-deserved by the quintet of young fools for whom it was intended. And I remember very vividly the sense of relief with which, in the small hours of the morning, wet to the skin and aching with fatigue, we ran the skiff's keel up Eastney beach again. The experience was very literally our sea baptism. Yet (such is the power of resilience in youth), like the infant who has undergone the ordeal of the font, the following morning we had practically forgotten all about it. But for all that I think we awoke with a new-born, if tacit, respect for the element on which we were to spend so much of our lives.

In the examination at the end of the Eastney course several of the batch failed, and, as had been the case with gunnery and infantry drills, were put back for further instruction. I am sure there was a catch in it somewhere ; yet, in spite of the poor opinion of my abilities held by my old schoolmaster, I passed "with distinction" in all four subjects, a fact with which, you

may be sure, I was at pains to acquaint him, and which doubtless gave him yet another shock.

On my return to Chatham I found myself detailed for duty at the recruit dépôt, Deal; and thither, with my soldier servant, his wife, his four children, and a vanful of our collective lares and penates, I in due course "proceeded." It was the first of a series of similar progresses, as the Elizabethans would have called them; indeed, in this respect the first decade of my military career was a chequered one, the black squares upon the board marking my periodical moves from one garrison to another in a tangle of basinettes and perambulators. I may add, as an instance of the strength of the Corps, that the pawns in the game (to one at least of whom I was godfather) seemed to have increased their numbers with each successive journey, the only occasions on which I encountered them.

I had now had a year's personal experience of the training of an officer of the Sea Regiment; at the Dépôt I was to see its rank and file in the making, and to learn to what superlative heights of precision infantry drill is capable of reaching. At that period the average length of the recruit's land training was eight months, in the course of which he climbed the military ladder by means of some thirteen rungs or squads, beginning with the "goose-step" in the thirteenth and passing out in the first as the most finished specimen of the infantry soldier probably in the whole world. This passing out of the First Squad was, and still is, a notable episode in the life of the Dépôt: everyone off duty assembled to witness it; even the G.O.C. at Dover, nine miles away, would frequently ride over with some of his staff to see it; and when, on a more recent occasion, his present Majesty, the Colonel-in-Chief of the Corps, visited the Dépôt, he was so impressed by the squad's drill that he graciously commanded it and all its successors to be styled thenceforth "The King's Squad." Those who have seen its performance at the

Royal Military Tournament, and are qualified to judge, will agree that not even the Guards, fine soldiers as they are, can excel in precision of movement the King's Squad of the Royal Marines.

Nor does the later growth of sea-legs appreciably affect this steadiness and smartness acquired at the Depôt.

At a pre-war review in Malta the Kaiser, an expert in drill if not in psychology, complimented the Governor on the magnificent bearing and marching of the Guards. It was difficult to convince him that the "Guards" of his assumption were a battalion of Marines flung together from the ships lying in the Grand Harbour.

One of the multifarious duties of the orderly officer at the Depôt is to witness the issue of their free kits to recruits as they arrive. Mustered at the Quartermaster's Stores, the "rookie" holds open his new canvas bag, into which the Quartermaster-Sergeant thrusts each article in quick succession and with a gabbled recitation of their names. Long practice had enabled him to reel off the latter with the volubility of an accomplished parrot, the burden of his song being, "Three shirts—two in your bag and one y'ave on; two pairs of boots—one in your bag and one y'ave on; three pairs of socks—one at the wash, one in your bag, and one y'ave on," and so on to the end of the generous list.

On one occasion, instead of promptly making way for the next man on the completion of his own kit, a recruit held up the sacred ritual for at least a minute by stirring up the contents of his bag.

"What 'ave you lost now?" demanded the harried Q.M.S. "You've not been 'ere a dog-watch, and you're delayin' the whole routine of the Depôt already."

"I ain't lost nothin,' because I never 'ad it to lose," retorted the recruit resentfully. "You kep' on tellin' me it was in me bag, but I was quick enough to spot that you never shoved it in. I ain't goin' to be made

to pay for what I never 'ad—why, you must 'ave kep' back 'alf a dozen of 'em at least ! ”

“ 'Alf a dozen o' what ? ” roared the sergeant, too outraged even to remember the presence of an officer.

“ Them ' yav-ons,' whatever they may be,” explained the aggrieved recruit.

During my sojourn at Deal I took ten days' leave, and, in company with one of the Majors, visited Ostend, Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels, and the field of Waterloo. I climbed to the summit of Antwerp spire—reputed to be the tallest on the Continent—while the Major, to whom prolonged strenuous effort did not appeal, slumbered decorously on a chair hundreds of feet below me. I say “decorously,” for in the public eye at least (which is all that need concern us) he was Decorum personified, and dressed the part so correctly that I fear my socks and ties must have caused him acute suffering. On the morning of our Waterloo pilgrimage I recall sitting with him, wedged among a brakeful of perspiring pilgrims, before the Hôtel de Ville in Brussels, and my chief impression of the jaunt is his look of agonised horror as a red-faced man upon the box advertised our departure on the cornet.

After a year at the Dépôt—to which it was ordained I should twice return in the course of my service—I was ordered to join H.M.S. *Valiant*, the coastguard ship on the west coast of Ireland. A detachment bound for the same destination awaited me, it appeared, at Plymouth headquarters; and thither one December day in 1882, and accompanied by a certain Private Shergold (officially styled my “attendant,” but actually the power behind the throne, so to speak), I “proceeded.” It was the first time since Mr. Shergold had “taken me on,” as he himself phrased it, that my railway progress was unattended by wayside ribaldry; for on this occasion, to my unbounded relief, the basinettes and perambulators had perforce to be left behind.



CHAPTER V

The Ship in the River.

THE MORNING ON WHICH the detachment and I marched from Plymouth Barracks to Millbay Docks brought us as typical a sample of our native climate as any Briton has a right to expect. It was cold, wet and dark; it was blowing a whole gale of wind, and the ominously named "Rolling" *Dodo*, the Irish pig-boat in which we were to take passage to Cork, was doing her best to live up to her reputation even in the sheltered water of the docks.

My father had come to see me off. His naval soul was fretted by the prospect of so small a ship attempting to round the Land's End in the teeth of a sou'westerly gale, and, with a view to advocating delay, he rashly sought the skipper, one Captain O'Toole, upon the bridge. But that red-faced, choleric seaman, harried by the arrival of a detachment of soldiers and their baggage, met the suggestion with such a torrent of sea invective that my father descended the ladder with the temporarily recovered agility of youth. "I go to sea at eight bells," roared the profane mariner after him, "even if Archangel Gabriel himself is waiting for me off the Scillies!" With a hurried farewell to me, my father fled, to write his intention, I have little doubt, of doubling his annual subscription to that admirable Society the Missions to Seamen.

His forebodings were certainly justified. When we cast off from the jetty the weather, it is true, had moderated. But it proved to be no more than a lull,

and we were barely clear of the Rame before the villainous little *Dodo* was rolling her upper deck rails in the sea and we were wishing her as extinct as her namesake. After four days of this continuous "stag-gering to and fro like a drunken man" (the Psalmist doubtless had had a similar trip), we wished it still more fervently; for, though the passage normally takes twenty-four hours, we were at sea ninety-six, and, on our arrival at Cork, found that we had been given up as lost. It was one of the worst gales, and the ship in which we weathered it one of the liveliest I have ever experienced.

Yet I laugh still when I recall the appearance of the detachment as it crawled from between decks in Queenstown Harbour. The hold, which had been hastily cleared out for their accommodation, had lately contained a cargo of flour. We had, of course, been battened down during the gale, but the sea, nevertheless, had contrived to get into the hold, with the result that every man was thickly coated from head to foot with white paste. We were, as usual, in scarlet, and the sergeant-major was on the verge of tears. But he smiled again, if a little sceptically, when I pointed out that, if the men baked themselves before a fire, they could easily chip the pie-crust off each other with their bayonets.

As the day of our belated arrival was a Sunday and the train service practically at a standstill, we were billeted that night in Cork Barracks with the Rifle Brigade. They were kind, if a trifle aloof; for, since few of them had encountered before that strange sea creature, the Marine, they were not sure that he might not bite. The next morning we entrained for Foynes, the railhead on the Shannon, in which river the *Valiant* then lay. But Ireland is a leisurely country when no one is treading on the tail of her coat, and we reached Foynes at so late an hour at night that the launch, sent up the river for us from the ship, had, like the

Cork people, given us up, and returned to the anchorage at Tarbert. We had, therefore, to complete the last lap of the wearisome journey by a night march of some fourteen miles, and the whisky-and-soda thrust in my hand by a hospitable messmate on reaching the ward-room is one of the drinks which linger in my memory.

The invariable greeting to a new arrival on board the *Valiant* was, "Hullo! what have *you* been tried for?" As a first introduction to the Navy the question was not encouraging, though I soon discovered that it was justified. For the majority of my future messmates had been tried by court-martial, and most of the remainder had black marks against their names at the Admiralty. One gallant officer, indeed, had achieved the distinction of trial on three several occasions by the naval, military, and civil powers respectively; but he was in a class by himself. In short, the *Valiant* was a sort of glorified convict ship, to which all the black sheep of the Navy drifted in turn. It may not have been an ideal fold for a lamb like myself. But I do not think the sheep were as black as they pretended to be, and, in any case, they were infinitely more amusing than a shiplot of saints like the *Mayflower* could have been. On the other hand, the feminine saints on board that historic emigrant vessel may have made things hum a bit, whereas the eminently masculine *Valiant*, of course, lacked the flutter of a single mid-Victorian petticoat.

Whether my messmates were black sheep or not, soon after joining the ship I witnessed the first of those many acts of gallantry I have since seen performed all over the globe by the officers and men of the Royal Navy.

One pitch-black night—the ship at the time was lying in the broad estuary of the Shannon—while the officers were at dinner in the wardroom, the poignant sea cry of "Man overboard!" was raised by the watch on deck. The tide was running like a mill-race; a howling gale of wind blowing from the opposite direction

had raised so big a sea that all the boats had been hoisted at the davits. The ship possessed neither the search-lights nor the electric installation of more recent times; the clamour of wind and sea would have stifled the cries of a drowning ship's company; to attempt under the conditions to pick up a single man seemed as hopeless as the proverbial impossibility of finding a needle in a stack of hay.

But the word "impossible" has no place in the vocabulary of the British Navy. A lieutenant—his historic name, Cochrane, should be recorded—quietly rose from the table, ascended the ladder, leisurely crossed the deck, and went overboard, dinner-jacket and all, into the black pandemonium of the night. The water was icy cold; he must have known that the chances against being picked up were a thousand to one. But somewhere out yonder in the darkness and the leaping seas a shipmate was fighting for his life, and that was all that concerned Cochrane. Boats were lowered and eagerly manned, though at considerable risk—indeed, one of them was blown so far up the river that she did not regain the ship till the following forenoon.

For half an hour blue flares were burnt, their ghostly light revealing the desolation of the seascape. Then, just as hope was being abandoned, a flicker of blue flame chanced to fall upon the anchor buoy, to which the two men were seen to be clinging. They were quickly hauled on deck, though by that time the stoker, the man who had fallen overboard, was unfortunately dead. Cochrane, exhausted as he was, calmly descended to the wardroom as if nothing unusual had occurred. His first act on reaching it was typical of the *sang-froid* of the Navy. It was to call for a glass of oil, into which he carefully dropped his watch!

Not long afterwards I saw a seaman fall overboard from the same ship. He was smoking at the time, and he came to the surface with his pipe still clenched

between his teeth. His first act after being rescued was to knock the wet tobacco from the pipe, borrow a refill and a match from a shipmate, and continue his interrupted smoke. Can one wonder that the German fleet is at the bottom of the sea? I should add that Lieutenant Cochrane was subsequently awarded the Royal Humane Society's silver medal for his act of gallantry. I doubt if the gold one has ever been more deservedly won.

The *Valiant* was a mid-Victorian ironclad with a broadside of eighteen muzzle-loading guns, which could be fired (in the rare absence of a short-circuit) by electricity from the bridge. The recently acquired trick of making the whole pack of these veteran dogs of war bark at the same instant was undoubtedly impressive (in the matter of noise and concussion at all events) when it chanced to come off. But, since short-circuits in those days were the rule rather than rare accidents, the chief value of the stunt from my point of view was the resulting duel in sea profanity between the First Lieutenant and the Chief Engineer, who seemed to have a divided responsibility in the business. It is only fair to add that peace was invariably restored over a glass of wardroom port and in the pious agreement that the failure of the electric current should be ascribed to the act of God.

The ponderous ironclad was barque-rigged, and she and her consorts of the old Reserve Squadron used to go to sea in favourable weather under a brave spread of canvas, including royals and stu'n's'ls. They were undoubtedly picturesque, as I was soon to have an opportunity of realising; but as the sails only added a knot or two to the speed of the engines, I question whether they were worth the very forcible sea language expended on their manipulation. Looking back, one realises the pathos of the persistency with which the old school of sailors clung to sail power long after it had been superseded by steam.

The cabin, which was my bedroom for the next two years to come, was a noisome kennel below the water-line, in which one could neither swing the proverbial cat nor see one's reflection in the glass even at midday without the aid of candles. It was, it is true, nominally lighted and ventilated by a six-foot upward shaft through the ship's side, terminating in a thick glass "scuttle" a foot or two above the sea-level. But as the scuttle had to be tightly screwed home, even in harbour, when there was the least ripple on the sea, one had usually to choose between the risk of asphyxiation and that of a gallon or two of water in one's bed. Nor was the alternative of keeping the door open less free from objection. For the fetid atmosphere of the steerage outside (in which a dozen hammocks were slung at night) and the rats which squeaked and scampered there till dawn were incidents of the sea life to be shut out rather than admitted.

When I joined the ship she was snuggled down and housed in for the winter. Her t'gallantmasts and topmasts were down, and her upper deck was covered from stem to stern by canvas awnings, which shed a perpetual gloom, but which were necessitated by a climate euphemistically described by the natives as "soft." Indeed, the patter of the rain was so continuous that it was a legend of the ship that the Clerk of the Weather worked overtime in the Shannon region and that it rained 366 days in the year. In any case the perpetual drip from the awnings, the twilight in which we lived, and the desolation of the streaming landscape were so depressing that I was not surprised to learn that shortly before my arrival the Captain of Marines had blown his brains out.

Yet life was not entirely an *andante* in the minor; key and movement would sometimes change to an *allegro* passage in the major, and the normal gloom would be temporarily forgotten. There were, for instance, a piano in the wardroom and no less than two of us

who could play it—symptoms of naval decadence over which the older sea-dogs of the early 'eighties were wont to growl in their beards. There were, too, in spite of the legend I have quoted, days of soft sunshine, when the scent of peat fires was in the air, and the Kerry mountains, like ancient Britons, seemed to have stained themselves blue. It was on one such day that I got my first glimpse of the distant McGillicuddy's Reeks; and I can still recall the thrill with which my eye suddenly caught their fairy peaks high in the clouds and far above the altitude at which I had expected to see them. But I think we admired, even more than their native mountains, the beauty and charm of the Irish ladies; and in Listowel and at scattered country houses we danced away the golden hours of youth, and, being benighted, slept in bedrooms from which we not infrequently viewed the stars through some unattended hole in the roof.

And last, though by no means least, there was the "Nunner," a watchkeeping messmate of evergreen memory, whom a sympathetic Admiralty had presumably sent to the ship to temper the winter of our discontent with sunbursts of riotous laughter. In his career through the Navy he had left behind him a lasting ripple of mirth, for it is safe to say he had no equal in rousing Authority to frenzy by blunders which outraged every canon of sea etiquette. It is true that they varied in gravity: to shove off in a boat from the ship's side (in full view of an Admiral) with fenders hanging over her gunnel and the sheet made fast to wind'ard may have risked no more than a Commander's death from apoplexy. But when, as officer of the watch on a dirty night at sea, he tapped for ten minutes on the skipper's cabin door for permission to stop the ship and lower a boat to pick up a man overboard and already a mile astern, he came within an ace of causing a Post-Captain's death in addition to an unfortunate seaman's. It was small wonder that on the eve of

more than one critical naval occasion, and on the principle of prevention being safer than cure, he was rumoured to have been placed under arrest to avoid accidents.

As a sportsman he was perhaps even less of a "star turn" than as a sailor. Although he contrived to wangle some shooting out of a neighbouring landowner whose preserves were full of game, for a long period he failed to hit anything smaller than an occasional beater. But there came at length a red-letter day when he triumphantly appeared on board with a small white hare, alleged to have been shot by himself, but declared by sceptics to have been purchased for five shillings from a keeper. In any case, after hanging under the fore-bridge for some days as evidence to the ship's company of his prowess, the animal was cooked, and, beneath a large cover, set upon the wardroom table at lunch-time before the "Nummer."

Before the cover could be raised, however, he was called on deck as officer of the day to receive the Captain, who was bringing off a party of ladies in the galley. It was an opportunity promptly seized by one of those opportunists in a naval mess who are ever on the lookout for mischief. In the wardroom galley there lived a disreputable, begrimed, white cat named "George," and, calling one of the Marine waiters, the opportunist directed him to carry the dish back to the galley, substitute "George" for the hare, and replace it on the table before the "Nummer's" return. The manoeuvre was executed with the dispatch that characterises the Corps when dealing with emergencies, and in a few minutes the outraged "George," volubly protesting beneath his cover, was placed before the vacant chair at the table.

His duties as usher performed, the "Nummer" in due course returned, to find the Mess plunged in a babel of conversation, designed, unsuspected by him, to drown the dismal wailings of "George." At a sign

from the gifted author of the pleasantry the cover was lifted with a flourish, while instant silence (save for the feline profanity) fell upon the Mess. The atmosphere became tense with suppressed hysteria when the petrified "Nummer" found himself confronted by the supposed hare, now transformed into a spitting Hecate with arched back and bristling whiskers, glaring in its miraculous resurrection with vengeful eyes at its conscience-stricken slayer. With one final yell of rage "George" sprang upon his shoulder, clawed his way on to the deck, and, with distended tail, streaked through the wardroom doorway like a November meteor. And while the Mess rocked with laughter below, the ladies on deck, who had viewed the episode through the open skylights, leaned against stanchions and implored a merciful Heaven to end their sufferings.

The *Valiant* rolled so dangerously that the Admiralty would not permit her to cruise during the winter months in the Atlantic. Indeed, I recall one summer's day off the coast of Donegal when, encountering a long, glassy, beam swell, she worked up such a terrific swing that she rolled the water through her upper deck ports, which stood as high above the sea-level as the first-story windows of a house. This liveliness in a seemingly flat sea was very disquieting. The ship eventually had to be steered a point or two off her course, otherwise she would have probably capsized. I have often wondered whether the Admiralty sent all the black sheep to the *Valiant* in the pious hope that an act of God would one day rid the Navy of a peck of trouble.

CHAPTER VI

The "Gobby" Squadron.

THERE CAME AT LENGTH a March day when the ship seemed suddenly to feel the rising sap of spring and to wake from her long winter sleep. Beneath her awnings she hummed like a bee-hive: a medley of detached sounds—strident sea commands, the shrill pipe of the bo's'n's mate, the answering rush of feet, the ring of hammers, the creaking of blocks—fell continuously upon the air and sent the gulls circling and screaming in agitation high above our heads. Barefooted seamen, struggling with the lashings of the awning, danced upon the hammock nettings, or, descending to the deck, blasphemed as fourteen-stone Marines trod upon their toes with ammunition boots. Heavy awnings disappeared, and with them the squat appearance of the hull; resurrected topmasts and t'gallant-masts added a score of cubits to her stature; yards were crossed, sails bent, and by dusk the ship had lost her Noah's ark semblance and had become once more a seagoing man-of-war. The chrysalis had burst into a thing of beauty—for, indeed, there were few things of statelier beauty on the sea than the sailing ironclads of the last century; and, when she presently spread her wings in the sunshine, it was difficult to realise that she was the same inert hulk which had housed us all the winter.

A few days later we hove the anchor out of the Shannon mud in which it had been embedded for the past five months, and proceeded to the wide mouth of

the estuary for target practice off Loop Head. It was my first experience of firing the big guns at sea, and my impressions may have been blurred by the thick smoke caused by the black powder of the time. But it seemed to me that there was less concern on the part of the Captain, Commander, and First Lieutenant to hit the target than to expend the prescribed number of rounds and return to the anchorage with as much dispatch and as little damage to the paintwork as possible. That red star, Percy Scott, was not yet in the ascendant, and gunnery still ranked in importance after "spit and polish," the obsession of the mid-Victorian Navy.

But, indeed, to a novitiate like myself the ways of the Sea Service were for the most part as incomprehensible as those of the other sex. Although we had wasted much costly ammunition to save time, after the "Cease fire!" sounded we spent a whole hour and many tons of coal in the difficult business of picking up the target, by that time reduced to a tangle of rag and splinter. I may add that the Marines, who manned two of the maindeck guns and one on the quarter-deck, made the highest score in the ship, an achievement which elated me far more then than in after years when I had grown to expect it.

The date of the annual summer cruise of the Reserve Squadron for drills and instruction was now approaching, and its first symptoms were the arrivals by batches of the "gobbies" or coastguards who, for this naval occasion, brought the ship's company up to its full complement. From little whitewashed cottages tucked away in a score of creeks on the indented coast between Queenstown and Derry, they were fetched in the picturesque sailing cutters of the coastguard service, and fine seamen of the old school they were. The Chief Officers and Commissioned Boatmen who accompanied them were messed in the ship's empty midshipmen's berth or gunroom; and, since we carried no officers of

the latter rank, these hoary-headed old sea-dogs performed midshipmen's duties at sea, and were officially known as the "Young Gentlemen."

The rendezvous of the Squadron was Portland, and thither, one mid-June day in 1883, we "proceeded." Some of our consorts were already anchored in the roads; the remainder turned up from their several ports at intervals during the next few hours, when we all sailed for Spithead. It is interesting to recall the names of those vanished ironclads of forty years ago, that "Gobby" Fleet which guarded our coasts with its muzzle-loading ordnance and, under sail, rang with the sea cries of Nelson's day. They were the *Lord Warden*, flagship of Vice-Admiral Sir Anthony Hiley Hoskins, K.C.B., *Defence*, *Penelope*, *Repulse*, *Shannon*, *Hector* (the *Valiant's* sister ship, though a lady of more staid demeanour at sea), and the *Hercules*.

The Captain of the last-named ship, afterwards a distinguished Admiral, was known throughout the Navy, and is still remembered, by his nickname "Pompo." Beneath his many eccentricities lay a kindly disposition and an unfailing courtesy, and I retain a pleasant recollection of those rare occasions on which our paths crossed. If he had not been a notable sailor, he might have rivalled M. Paquin as a man milliner; for the bees which buzzed loudest in his bonnet were the Dress Regulations, a subject of which he probably knew more than all the naval tailors in the kingdom combined. Another of his foibles was to affect a slightly foreign accent and phraseology (though British seaman was stamped all over him), and he invariably addressed his subordinates of commissioned rank as "Mr. Officer."

When a man-of-war is berthed alongside the dockyard, the sentry at other times posted on her fore-bridge is transferred to the jetty. One day, when the *Hercules* was refitting in Portsmouth Dockyard, the Captain sent for the officer of Marines on duty.

"Mr. Officer," he began, when the subaltern appeared

in the cabin, "from my stern gallery a few moments ago I observed the sentinel on the jetty present arms to the Chief Engineer of the ship. Why, pray?"

"Because, sir," explained the young Marine, a little surprised by the question, "the Chief Engineer is a three-ringed officer, and it is laid down in the instructions that a sentry presents arms to all naval officers wearing three or more rings on the sleeve."

"Pompo" pointed to the four upon his own. "Then the sentinel pays the same compliment to the Chief Engineer," he snorted, "as he would to ME, the Captain of the ship?"

The Marine officer agreed. The regulations, he declared, provided no higher mark of respect for the Captain, nor could the Chief Engineer receive less.

"Pompo" drummed on the table with his fingers. The sentry's presence on the jetty was obviously essential; it was equally obvious that the Chief Engineer, bent on his lawful occasions, could not be prevented from passing him. The question was a vexed one, but "Pompo" was a seaman of resource.

"Mr. Officer," he commanded with a grin, "take away the sentinel's gun."

After anchoring for a night in the Downs—an opportunity I seized to revisit the *Depôt* at Deal—the squadron sailed for Heligoland, then a British possession. The morning of our arrival was fine, and my first impression of the island was that of a grass-crowned, ochre-coloured rampart of rock, towering through the summer haze out of an amethyst sea. Perched on its eastern brink was one-half of a little town—a picturesque tumble of whitewashed walls, red roofs, and green shutters, the other half appearing to have avalanched on to the shelving beach below. With the morning sun winking in their eave-shaded windows, they suggested a brick-and-mortar crowd peering in expectation of some event towards the Elbe, the lazier leaning with their backs against the cliff, the more

enterprising ascended for a wider view to the summit. Perhaps they saw through the mist the vision of that sinister flag which would one day replace the Union Jack above them.

I was one of several hundred officers and men who were weatherbound on the island for the night, for the promise of the morning was not fulfilled: a gale suddenly springing up while we were on shore, we were unable to get off to our ships, whose hulls loomed mistily far out in the offing. The sleeping accommodation of the little fishing community was soon exhausted, and I and many others spent the night on the brick floor of the inn kitchen. One wonders if any of those slumberers about the crimson fire that wild night dreamed of the battle of Heligoland destined to be fought some thirty years later. If so, the dreamer wisely kept his vision to himself; for at that time—at any time during the next three decades—the suggestion of war between Britain and Germany would have been deemed, by all save a far-sighted few, sheer lunacy.

From Heligoland we headed for Bergen, encountering off the Norwegian coast one of the dense fogs prevalent in the North Sea at that season of the year. Even when unhampered by consorts, the mariner infinitely prefers a gale of wind to a fog; when he is steaming in company with seven other heavy ironclads he loves the latter still less. Station between the ships was kept with the aid of bell buoys, each vessel towing one, her successor in the line regulating her speed so as to keep it on her port bow. At night the safety of the ship depended largely on the officer of the watch's ability to locate sound, always a difficult task in a fog; and the incessant clanging of the engine-room telegraph, added to the ringing of the bells upon the buoys, soon awakened a belated sympathy with the equestrienne of our nursery days, who journeyed to a perpetual accompaniment of bells, and to witness whose departure we had so often been invited to ride-a-cock-horse. And

so, like a flock of bell-wethers blundering through a mountain mist, we tinkled our way to Bergen.

The passage of the squadron in "single line ahead" through the intricacies of the fiord—thirty-five miles long—which links that town with the sea, was full of interest. So majestic are the mountain walls between which the narrow channel winds that the ships seemed to have been suddenly dwarfed to the scale of toy models. Viewed from the tail of the line, the distant flagship appeared to be perpetually vanishing into the face of the rock itself; yet, arrived at the same point ourselves, we would find a sharp turn with the flagship repeating her vanishing trick at the far end of it. On opening out the town she saluted the Norwegian flag with twenty-one guns, the echoes rolling like thunder from mountain to mountain long after the last gun had been fired; and so deep was the fiord right up to the town quays that the squadron was able to moor within biscuit throw of the houses, the *Valiant* anchoring in 48 fathoms (288 feet) of water.

In Norway the June midnight brings no more than an opal dusk, and at a dance given in our honour it was perfectly easy at that hour to read the names on one's programme without the aid of artificial light. I still retain that programme, and sometimes, when in retrospective mood, wonder what has become of the fair *Frökens* with whom I danced in the northern twilight more than forty years ago. The probability that some by this time have joined the angels fills me with a gentle melancholy; the thought that most of the survivors must be grandmothers of weight in the world—with shingled hair, doubtless—causes me to pray that I may never revisit Bergen.

Nor did the bleakness of Lerwick and Kirkwall, our two next ports of call, rouse any desire to see the isles of Shetland and Orkney again. My chief impression of the former town is that of women at open doors filling the street with bandinage in a barbarous tongue

to a ceaseless click of knitting needles. It was the ritual of the Shetland shawl in the making. And at Kirkwall one received a faint shock of surprise. For the discovery of a cathedral in full blast, as it were, in that northern *ultima thule*—a fane, too, as imposing as the name of the saint, Magnus, to whom it is dedicated—was like meeting a member of the Metropolitan Police on duty at the top of the Matterhorn.

A few days later the squadron steamed into the Moray Firth and anchored off the town of Invergordon, whence I made a pilgrimage to the battlefield of Culloden. With the aid of newly acquired military lore and a packet of cigarettes I spent the summer afternoon reconstructing the drama enacted on that spot a hundred and thirty-seven years before. I climbed the stone from which "Butcher" Cumberland is reputed to have viewed the battle; I visited the row of cottages still known as the King's Stables; and I traced on the moor the green ridges which mark the trenches in which the Hanoverian dead were buried, and the rough stones inscribed with simple dignity, "Here fell the Chiefs of the Campbell Clan," "Here lie the Chiefs of the Clan Macleod." Lying on my back in the heather, the heat haze all about me, I conjured up the vision of the stiff red uniforms looming dimly through the smoke, the charge of the wild Highlanders as claymore clashed on bayonet and the air resounded with shouts and with the cries of the dying. But the saddest thing I saw was the ghost of a gallant figure, that of "Bonnie Prince Charlie" himself, riding in flight across the heather to a drunken and disreputable old age.

After a brief stay at Leith, the port of Edinburgh, the squadron returned to the Downs, thus completing the circuit of the North Sea. The following summer we carried out a similar cruise, this time circling the British Isles and visiting the Hebrides and Achill in the north-west of Ireland. At the conclusion of each cruise the *Valiant* proceeded to Lough Swilley, Donegal,

for the autumn, thence to Bantry Bay, our new winter station in the south; so that altogether in the course of two years I acquired a considerable knowledge of the harbours and coastline of the United Kingdom.

As I have hinted, we had small use for gales of wind at sea in the *Valiant*. But there came a gale when, willy-nilly, we had to leave our sheltered berth in Lough Swilley and face the full violence of the Atlantic. News reached us that H.M. gunboat *Wasp* had been wrecked with the loss of all hands but six on Tory Island, and we were sent in quest of those six survivors. Creeping as close under the towering cliffs as we dare, we managed eventually to pick up the castaways, who were brought out to us in a tremendous sea by the intrepid islanders.

The story of the wreck is the story of a ship and some fifty lives, including his own, thrown away by the stupid attempt on the part of a young officer to carry out the letter rather than the spirit of his instructions. As officer of the middle watch (midnight to 4 a.m.), he had been set a course by the navigator which should have taken him well to wind'ard of the island. The ship was under easy sail, the night fine and clear; Tory light was burning brightly. But a strong and unsuspected current was bearing the doomed gunboat towards the island. Instead of rousing his superiors, instead even of running inside the island—as he could easily have done up to the last moment—he held on the course that had been given him and crashed the ship upon the rocks right under the lighthouse. She went to pieces instantly, all that we saw of her being her mainmast washing about in the sea. The survivors clung to the face of the cliff all night, from which they were picked off like limpets by the light-house keepers in the morning.

Not long afterwards another *Wasp*, also a gunboat, curiously enough, was lost in a typhoon in the China

seas. That was roughly thirty years ago, and ever since the ill-omened name has been conspicuous by its absence from the Navy List.

I will conclude my reminiscences of the *Valiant* with the following instance of the imperturbability of the Navy in the face of danger.

One night—the fleet at the time was cruising in the Atlantic—the Captain chanced to be dining with the officers in the wardroom, when the quartermaster of the watch appeared in the doorway. For a moment he stood there, his eye roving gloomily round the table until he marked where the Captain sat. Then, with no trace of hurry, he removed his cap, leisurely made the circuit of the wardroom, and bent over the skipper's chair.

“I beg your pardon, sir, for disturbing you at dinner,” he politely murmured, “but the officer of the watch's compliments and the *Defence* is about to ram us.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the crash came! I have never seen a wardroomful of officers shin up three flights of ladders in quicker time, nor—when I gained the quarterdeck—two ships in more hopeless confusion. Their yards and rigging were closely interlocked and in an indescribable tangle; both ships were rolling heavily in a long ground swell, with a grinding and screeching of steel plates that set one's teeth on edge. It was long before the two vessels could shake each other off, and both were in considerable danger till we crawled into Berehaven, like a couple of disreputable night birds, in the small hours of the morning.

When the *Valiant* went round to Plymouth to refit in the early summer of 1885 my detachment and I returned to barracks, after having served afloat nearly two and a half years. My soldiering at Plymouth was of brief duration, for within a few months I was detached for the second time to the recruit dépôt at

Deal, where I spent so uneventful a year that I can only recall the following episode.

Inspecting the kits of my company one morning, I came across a new pair of socks which had been badly burnt. As the owner could give no explanation of the damage, I had no option but to order him to pay for another pair. He objected, and I referred the matter to the Captain of the company, who, after investigation, upheld my decision.

The man then appealed to Cæsar; and in due course the Captain and I, the company sergeant-major and half the man's barrack-room, the man himself and the burnt socks, appeared before the Colonel Commandant. He listened, asked questions, examined the socks with a magnifying-glass, called for the expert opinion of the master-tailor, and—confirmed the decree of the company officers. Still the man protested, with the result that the C.O. ordered a court of inquiry to sit on the burnt socks. It assembled next morning, sat for three days, examined a crowd of witnesses, and recorded its opinion that, since there were no fires in the barrack-rooms at midsummer, the socks must have been burnt by the heat of the man's feet.

CHAPTER VII

The Muses, a Misadventure, and the Main Guard.

THERE ARE TWO LADIES with whom I have long been in love, and each of whom I have wooed with considerable ardour. The very indifferent success which has attended those wooings I attribute largely to the fact that even now I find it difficult to determine which of them holds first place in my affections. Both have shed a gracious influence over my life, one filling it with song, the other with colour; for I speak of the sister Muses—Music and Painting.

No one has a deeper appreciation than I of the value of the national love of games in moulding the British race. I take off my hat to the man who is proficient in any open-air game of skill. Personally my ambitions have never lain in that direction: to spend a chill afternoon kicking a football about a swampy field, or a hot one in racing cricket balls to the boundary, are propositions which have never caught my fancy. There have always seemed to me to be so many things better worth doing. It is, of course, a question of temperament, though, if I had given to cricket and football a tithe of the time I devoted to music and painting, I should doubtless have been a physically stronger man to-day. On the other hand, if I cannot display a pair of calves enlarged by youthful exercise between the goal-posts, I can show many a water-colour sketch of little-known parts of the earth, and, though I may be a flannelled fool at the wicket, I can play a festal march on the organ at a village wedding. And since these

trifles have given pleasure to other simple souls beside myself, what I have lost on the swings I may be said to have gained on the roundabouts.

As a schoolboy I was a pupil of the late John Pardew, a noted Plymouth musician still remembered in the West Country. I cherish in affectionate regard a tattered volume of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, bearing his pencilled comment "*Horful!*" after hearing my first rendering of the "Bees' Wedding." But if my fingers never acquired the flexibility needed for the performance of such *prestissimo* passages, John Pardew inspired me with a love for the works of the great German Masters and taught me to play their simpler compositions with appreciation and feeling.

When in due course I joined the Service, I was in great request at sing-songs and impromptu dances, a young officer who could do more than strum the piano being a greater rarity forty-five years ago than he is to-day. Yet there were times when I cursed the accomplishment. To find myself the one pianist in a crowd of stentorian—and for the most part tone-deaf—vocalists may at first have pleased my vanity; to be dragged repeatedly from my bed in the small hours to accompany ribald choruses on the piano ended in provoking my profanity. To take my turn at the keyboard at some improvised "hop" was a more congenial business, for in those days we danced to the haunting melodies of Strauss and Waldteufel, when the hideous din of the modern ballroom was undreamt of, and "civilisation" had not yet stooped to play the sedulous ape to Africa in syncopated time.

I was not of course the only pianist, even in my own batch, and I recall two of my contemporaries each of whom was a far more skilled musician than myself. Ernest Coke was perhaps the more popular, as he was certainly the more brilliant executant of the two. He specialised in memorising each of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas as its score was published, and their

advent was the musical sensation of the early 'eighties. G. T. Byrne was a musician of a different temperament. His favourite composer was Beethoven; and I recall sitting at the open window of his quarters at Deal one summer's night at the time of which I am now writing, watching the moonlit countryside and listening to Byrne in the shadows behind me as he played, with a sure and sympathetic touch, the immortal "Moonlight Sonata." Alas! the music of each has been stilled for many a long year, for Coke died in the Egyptian Campaign of 1882, while Byrne was killed in the Benin Expedition a decade later.

At more than one stage of its history the Royal Marine Depôt at Deal, like the *Valiant*, has been regarded as a convenient place of exile for officers of the Corps under a temporary cloud. The cloud at this particular period was mainly of an alcoholic character; indeed, for some time the Mess seemed in danger of becoming a home for inebriates who had so far escaped court-martial. Of the many changes I have witnessed in the *personnel* of the fighting services, I can recall no greater contrast than that between the widespread intemperance of the 'eighties and 'nineties of the last century and the general abstemiousness of to-day.

When I first joined, and for long afterwards, the most familiar sound in a Mess was the ringing of the wardroom or ante-room bell for whisky-and-soda. The resulting chink of tumblers ran through the entire day like the tinkle of a brook in a forest full of noise and murmur; for, since there were no prohibited hours, it began soon after breakfast and continued with varying, though never long, intervals till past midnight. The quantity of liquor consumed in the average Mess was prodigious; but it must be remembered that officers had more leisure then than now, and those who lacked resources in themselves drank less from desire than from the need for killing time. It was the venerable business of Satan finding mischief for the unemployed.

But the winebibbers were by no means confined to the Officers' Mess. Nowadays one might perambulate the streets of a naval port or garrison town a hundred times without meeting a wearer of the King's uniform the worse for liquor; there were nights in my youth when one could have counted the strictly sober on one's fingers. Few nights passed without a "drunk and incapable" being brought by the picket to the guardroom; on pay nights every guardroom in a garrison was packed with them. Nor, in this respect, were things any better afloat. When in Ireland, I recall seeing men brought off to the ship insensible from drink, laid in rows on the lower deck, and operated on by the doctors and sick-berth steward with the stomach-pump. It is true that the occasion was that of "general leave," the monthly saturnalia of the ship's "bad hats," and that their condition was due less to the quantity than to the quality of the poison they had imbibed. Still, in spite of non-prohibition, such a scene would be impossible in the Navy of to-day. But so deep-rooted is the tradition of intemperance, that even now, when a ship pays off, the Captain is required by the instructions to furnish with a certificate of sobriety each of his officers who has not been conspicuously drunk during the commission.

On the other hand, any case of intemperance must be entered by the Captain in red ink in the ship's log, and there is a story told of a First Lieutenant, who had been repeatedly logged, getting a bit of his own back. A day came when the Captain fell sick, and "Number One" found himself in temporary command. His first act was to make the cryptic entry in the log, "Captain sober to-day."

But in spite of its penal atmosphere—perhaps because of it—the Depôt has always held a very warm corner in my heart. Its environment of sea and open country make for health; there is less ceremonial and a closer *camaraderie* in the Mess than is possible at the three

headquarters, while the work of dry-nursing the recruit is a pleasant change from the drills and parades of big garrison centres like Chatham, Portsmouth, and Plymouth. For at Deal the duties of the company officers are administrative, being concerned only with the pay, rations, clothing, cleanliness, and discipline of the recruit. With his physical training and drills, which are the province of a staff of specialised instructors, they have no concern whatever.

One dark winter's morning, while I was witnessing the issue of meat, the butcher inadvertently chopped off the tip of his little finger. It flew up at a tangent, cannoned off the wall, and fell—where? I can see now the anxious faces of the recruits as, in the dim light, they peered into the tin dishes which bore the day's ration of their respective messes, and which they were about to convey to the cook-house. As the severed finger was never found, the poor butcher was the most unpopular man in barracks when dinner-time came!

The Dépôt consists of three separate groups of very old and widely scattered buildings known as the South, North, and Hospital Barracks respectively. They occupy so considerable an area between Deal and Walmer that the day and night rounds of the orderly officer entailed a brisk walk of some three-quarters of an hour's duration. In my time the greater part of that area was gravelled with shingle from the beach, so that after a few weeks at the Dépôt one acquired the gait of a ploughman. In all I served (at various dates) some three years at Deal, so that in the course of duty I must have tramped several hundred miles over shingle. Indeed, in such abhorrence do I hold the pebbly squelch that I attribute to it much of my detestation of the present barbarous disfigurement of "shingled" hair!

For recreation we had the usual games, augmented by rifle matches on the ranges at Kingsland and the run of the gymnasium after the recruits' training was

over for the day. From the barrack walls stretched a magnificent tract of open country in which I loved to roam—from Dover in one direction to the ancient town of Sandwich in the other, from the sea to Canterbury, whose cathedral shimmered in the haze like a fairy palace twenty miles away to the north. And there were occasional night adventures in one of the famed Deal luggers, adventures foreshadowed by whispered conferences with some weather-bitten sea-dog behind the door in the Mess kitchen. I regret to say that these nocturnal enterprises, so far from being participated in, should have been frowned upon, by Queen's officers; for, if there was little doubt as to the freshness of the fish on the morrow's breakfast table, there was still less as to its having been poached within the three-mile limit of the French coast.

In the spring of 1887 I returned to Plymouth and to the routine of a garrison town. The usual drills, parades, and company work in barracks were varied by battalion drill in the Brickfields and trooping the colour on Mount Wise—the latter a far more frequent ceremonial then than now; while for the harassed subaltern there was periodical Main Guard.

On Devonport Hill, and just within the line of the old fortifications, stands a venerable building of grey stone, faced with a row of arches and set upon a railed platform approached from each end by a flight of steps. It is a familiar object to everyone acquainted with the Three Towns, for it is situated on the principal highway connecting them, and is known as the Main Guard. To-day it stands empty and desolate: *Ichabod* is written all over it; as far back even as the Great War it had been diverted from its original purpose to a workroom for chattering "Sister Susies sewing shirts for soldiers." But in my youth it confronted the passers-by with a cheerful stir of men, the clatter of arms, and all the scarlet and golden array of a subaltern's guard. In the course of years I have seen it decline

to a sergeant's command, to a corporal's, to a solitary sentry posted from a neighbouring barrack guard, and, in spite of economists and pacifists, whenever I pass it I sigh for the pomp and circumstance of the past.

A multiplicity of printed instructions awaited the perusal of the officer who mounted Main Guard, and there was a traditional obligation he had to discharge which was neither indicated on the order board nor (presumably) came within the ken of the Authorities. It was a heavy tax both upon his head and purse ; for it entailed at his own expense the alcoholic refreshment, in which he was bound to participate, of every sailor or soldier officer whose thirst prompted him in passing to call upon the subaltern of the guard. With half a dozen bottles of whisky, then, beneath the table in his room and discreetly screened by the table-cloth, the young officer began his twenty-four hours' tour of duty, and it is scarcely surprising that more than one untoward incident resulted.

It was the custom for the Port Admiral and the General commanding the garrison, whose official residences were near by, occasionally to invite the officer of the Main Guard to dinner, for which purpose he was permitted to hand over his command to the sergeant for one hour. Since the invitation was in the nature of a command and could not be declined, the custom was, if unintentionally, a cruel one ; for, after a long day spent in dispensing hospitality, the unfortunate subaltern was not always in a condition to meet so senior an officer as an Admiral or a General at the dinner-table.

One morning a bluejacket from Admiralty House arrived at the Main Guard with the customary formal invitation, and the unhappy recipient sat down to answer it. But spelling was not his strong point, and the word "accept" defeated him. In the absence of a dictionary he consulted the sailor, who, it appeared, favoured the single "c" in his own correspondence.

Still doubtful, the subaltern referred the point to the sergeant, who, violently differing from the seaman, proposed that the views of the men in the guardroom should be taken. After a heated altercation, which attracted a small crowd of passers-by, the sergeant reported that the consensus of opinion was against the double "c," while the bugler, the last from school, had vehemently asserted that the word contained an "x." In the end the Navy triumphed, and the Admiral was informed (with a lack of truth he little suspected) that it gave the writer great pleasure to "accept" his kind invitation.

Whether it was due to this literary effort or to other causes I cannot say, but when dinner-time arrived he was obviously a bit "under the weather." His entrance on the butler's stentorian announcement was impressive, for, mistaking a shadow on the drawing-room threshold for a step that had no existence, he stamped upon the polished floor with a clatter of ammunition boots that arrested general attention and rattled the china on the shelves. Nor was his one contribution to the conversation at the dinner-table less notable than his arrival. Taxed by his hostess with having cut her the previous day in the town, he explained, amid a general hush, that he was a little deaf, and that it was entirely owing to the noise of a passing tram that he had failed to see her. His return journey to the Main Guard was accomplished (unsuspected by its owner) on the back axle of the brougham which was conveying a homeward-bound Bishop, one of his fellow guests.

One night, when I myself was on Main Guard, the sentry reported a fire in Plymouth, and on my going outside he pointed to an orange glow in the sky immediately above the old quarter of the town in which fires were not infrequent. After watching it a short time I came to the conclusion—in which the sergeant and the entire guard concurred—that the glow was increasing, and I ordered the bugler to sound the Fire Alarm.

A moment later it was repeated in the Raglan Barracks, Devonport, by my own Corps in Stonehouse, in the distant Citadel at Plymouth, till finally the tale was taken up by the guns of the guardship in the Hamoaze, and I knew that all the fire parties in the port and garrison had been roused from their slumbers and were waiting further instructions.

The Main Guard, of course, had turned out on the first alarm, and were standing under arms immediately behind me. All eyes were directed to the brightening glow in the east, and presently a man tittered.

"The next one as does that," growled the outraged sergeant, "will 'ave his name took."

But before long the sergeant himself was grinning, and the entire guard broke into unchecked laughter. For upon the crest of Staddon Heights, which overshadow Plymouth to the eastward, now lay a golden sickle, which all too soon swelled into an orange globe; and I realised, with a dismay I can still recall, that I had dragged from their hammocks and beds several hundred officers and men to witness the rising of the harvest moon! I can still remember many of the unofficial messages received by me the following day. They are all unprintable.

I will conclude my reminiscences of the old Main Guard with the following anecdote.

A sentry from the guard was posted at the top of a flight of steps leading to the official landing-place at Mount Wise, and among the orders on his board were the two following:

- I. No one is allowed to land at these steps except Lord Mount Edgecumbe and the Commander-in-Chief.
- II. No one is permitted to bathe in the vicinity of these steps without bathing-drawers.

On one occasion, while visiting the scattered sentries, I came in due course to the man at the top of the steps,

who chanced to be a recruit. I told him to repeat his orders. He scratched his head, gazed wildly at the sea and sky for inspiration, then blurted out the following information with obvious relief:

"No one," he grinned, "ain't allowed to bathe in the vicinity of these 'ere steps without bathing-drawers, except Lord Mount Edgecumbe and the Commander-in-Chief!"

CHAPTER VIII

Adam's Rib, a Fury, and a Troopship of the 'Eighties.

DURING THIS YEAR, 1887, I took advantage of my spell ashore to go through a long course of anatomy and painting from the living model at the Plymouth School of Art under Mr. Godfrey Evans. He must still be remembered by many Plymouthians, and the sound, if elementary, knowledge I acquired under his able tuition has afforded me so much pleasure during my wanderings over the globe that I am glad to have this opportunity of recording my indebtedness. And while I am on the subject I may mention the following instance of the curious literal-mindedness of certain people.

In a South Kensington examination paper set to the life class—a class composed mainly of women—we were asked, “How many ribs has (a) a man, (b) a woman?” While all gave woman her proper complement of 24, 75 per cent. of the class were of opinion that mere man possessed but 23! Adam's rib was a bone of contention with us for long afterwards.

The social side of garrison life possessed small attraction for me in those days: I was a shy bird, and the numerous nets spread by hostesses for the gay subaltern signally failed to lure me within the portals of a drawing-room. But there fell an afternoon when Destiny's finger pushed me, willy-nilly, up a garden path and into the midst of a social entertainment, to which I had been bidden, but which, until the last moment, I had not had the smallest intention of

attending. I arrived at a moment when that most exquisite form of torture, an amateur recitation, was being inflicted on the assembly, and, the room being crowded to suffocation, I had perforce to endure my share of it at the open doorway.

As the tragédienne within the room moaned and screamed by turns, I became aware of a girl beside me whose suppressed sense of humour was obviously causing her as much agony as my own was causing me. After the first glance, which simultaneously brought our handkerchiefs to our mouths, we dared not look at each other till the performance had ended in a burst of conventional applause, when, the tears of mirth still in her eyes, she turned to me with the line from the *Bab Ballads*, "We cannot chat together, for we've not been introduced."

"But," quoted I, in continuation, "we both know Robinson."

It soon transpired that we did; and, although till that moment we had been complete strangers, within five minutes we had discovered so many mutual "Robinsons" that we seemed to have known each other all our lives. And that is how I first met my future wife, whom I shall introduce more particularly in the proper place.

In June of the same year I was ordered to embark in H.M.S. *Hecate* for the Jubilee Review at Spithead and the subsequent summer manœuvres. She was described in the Navy List as a coast defence turret ship, and by *les misérables* who went to sea in her as a nightmare among sea-horses. There was very little of her visible above the surface, and when that little was steaming against a head sea she looked like a burst water-main. Down below we lived in lamplight and on tinned air; and, since the humorist who designed her had placed the uncased rudder-chains along the wardroom bulkheads, every time the helm was moved (which was about ten times a minute, as she steered

abominably) the resulting clatter recalled a train passing through a tunnel. Conversation soon degenerated into stentorian interludes of sea profanity, and for months afterwards in drawing-rooms and elsewhere we bellowed like Bulls of Bashan.

After the review we started to tow a couple of flat-bottomed gunboats round to Milford Haven, got caught in a gale of wind off the Land's End, parted our hawser, and lost sight of our two "flat irons" in as nasty a night as I can recall. With several fathoms of steel wire hawser threshing about astern our position was an unpleasant one, for had it fouled the screws the ship would have become unmanageable, and we should probably have fetched up on the Land's End. Even the wardroom officers were all called on deck to help get the hawser on board, which we eventually succeeded in doing: and the subsequent midnight banquet of gin and sardines, proper to such a naval occasion, lives in my memory still. A peaceful week at Lundy Island, where I spent much of my time staring at the Shutter Rock, and trying to visualise the great scene in *Westward Ho!* brought the brief commission to a close: and I for one was thankful enough to be quit of the old "'E Cat," as the lower-deck were wont to Anglicise her classic name.

Yet, with all its discomforts, sea adventure was infinitely more to my liking than the monotonous ease of garrison life; and I was not sorry when, at the close of the year, I was ordered to embark in the troopship *Tamar* for passage to China, there to join H.M.S. *Constance*, one of the squadron of corvettes on that remote station.

One December day, then—the 29th to be precise—headed by the drums and fifes, I once more marched out of Plymouth Barracks in command of a detachment, and, embarking in a gunboat at the Royal William Victualling Yard, was conveyed into the Sound, where the *Tamar* awaited us. She was taking out reliefs,

both for the fleet and for the garrisons in the Far East, and when we got alongside we found her in that state of ordered chaos peculiar to the Navy on such occasions. To a landsman her decks would have suggested a hopeless confusion of men, animals, arms, baggage, stores, and tangled ropes, the sorting out of which must have filled half the long voyage. And yet, such is the power of combined naval method and discipline, within an hour of sailing every officer and man was in his allotted berth, horses and dogs were stabled and kennelled, the live stock penned, arms ranged in the racks, baggage and stores stowed in the holds, ropes coiled down, and the decks restored to their normal man-of-war neatness and cleanliness.

A pilgrimage across the globe in a troopship forty years ago would doubtless have seemed to the creator of "Roderick Random" a *voyage de luxe*. As a matter of fact it meant most of the discomforts of the Navy of Smollett's time with none of the comparative luxury which tempers life on board a transport to-day. The *Tamar* possessed neither electric light nor fans, neither bathrooms nor cold storage: we were packed for a voyage through the tropics like herrings in a cask, and the lack of ventilation between decks transformed sleep into a stertorous unconsciousness, from which one recovered in the morning with a tongue like the side of a match-box. Never since have I journeyed with so mixed a bag of shipmates: the Canterbury Pilgrims were a uniform and homogeneous company compared with the kaleidoscopic crowd which swarmed about the decks of the *Tamar*. Every branch and rank of both the Fighting Services seemed to have its representative, from the naval post-captain taking passage, who, like Kipling's cat, walked for the most part by himself, to the cavalry subaltern, whose unfamiliarity with sea-horses prevented him for many days from walking at all. The variety of uniforms was bewildering: for, besides the distinctive white ring of the naval pay-

masters, the purple of the engineers, the red of the doctors, and the gold curl of the sailors proper, the regimental badges and facings of sappers, gunners, cavalrymen, highlanders, linesmen, and "muckers"—as the commissariat officers were crudely termed—provided a complete illustrated catalogue of the insignia then worn by the officers of the British Army and Navy. Add a padre or two, four or five ladies, a baby, and a solitary Marine, and you can visualise the crowd on the *Tamar's* quarterdeck any reasonably fine day at sea.

The senior officers were berthed, three in a cabin, round the saloon; the juniors—some fifty of us—being relegated to a noisome region immediately beneath it, aptly known as "Pandemonium." Some were imprisoned by pairs in dim and airless cells ironically termed cabins; the cots and hammocks of the remainder filled every inch of the space between them. For several days, and until we had grown accustomed to the conditions, the lack of elbow-room, the scanty light, and the rolling of the ship made shaving an impossibility, while the ritual of the matutinal tub suggested a watery inferno. In those days an officer had perforce to carry his bath about the globe with him, much as a snail carries its shell, and these yellow-painted circular baths of the period were fitted each morning into the available deck space till the place resembled a gigantic honeycomb. I can see now the crowd of naked forms—among which the privileged Commander-in-Chief and Lord Mount Edgeumbe of the sentry's imagination would have been quite in the mode—splashing, ragging, dancing in the light of a ship's lantern, and as unconcerned with the proprieties as a horde of savages on a tropical beach.

Our first port of call was Queenstown, where we embarked two companies of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders. These brought the ship's complement up to nearly a thousand souls, and with a strong head wind

and sea, which kept half of them in their bunks and hammocks, we rolled our way across the Bay and down the Portuguese coast, till some five days later we dropped anchor in the shadow of the great Rock of Gibraltar.

Since that early voyage I have become familiar enough—in common no doubt with many a reader of these pages—with the long line of outposts which connects England with her Far Eastern possessions. Yet the first impressions of a subaltern formed forty years ago may not be entirely devoid of interest, and in that hope I give the following brief record of them.

As a Marine, the Rock possessed for me a peculiar interest; for, although the Corps has been engaged in every sea fight and most land battles since its formation by Charles II in 1664, “Gibraltar” is the one name borne on its colours and accoutrements. In 1704 Queen Anne’s Marines, under Sir George Rooke and Sir Cloudesley Shovel, stormed and captured the hitherto impregnable fortress, and that brilliant feat of arms has ever since been deemed a sufficient battle honour for so modest a Regiment to commemorate. The question of selection from the others was, it is true, referred on one occasion to George IV, who sapiently observed that, since a frigate’s mainsail would be totally inadequate for their record, we had better content ourselves with one. The one His Majesty suggested was, as I have stated, “Gibraltar.”

I confess to a childish pleasure, which I have never been able to recapture on subsequent visits, in landing on the mole wearing the name of the great fortress on my cap-badge. It seemed to bridge the gulf of a hundred and eighty odd years, and to bring me in touch with my comrades of good Queen Anne’s reign. I have since seen the Rock under every condition of time and weather—sleeping like a couched lion in the moonlight, touched by the fires of dawn and sunset, swept by Atlantic gales, sweltering in the haze of a

summer noon. On that first occasion I saw it through a veil of pitiless, perpendicular rain, which soaked me to the skin, but failed to damp my youthful curiosity. For two hours in the early morning—the limit of our leave—I perambulated the narrow streets with unabated interest, carrying back with me to the ship a vivid impression of British soldiers in greatcoats and white helmets; Spaniards urging mules with mellifluous cries; herds of goats tinkling their advent with bells and being milked on doorsteps; Moors swinging by in the picturesque dress, and with the conquering air of their fifteenth-century ancestors; women with baskets of oranges; ochre-washed houses with green jalousies; convents, guard-houses, draw-bridges, archways, with everywhere a reek of garlic in the air. And, dominating all, the towering Rock, looming sullenly through the silver screen of the rain.

Under easy steam and all plain sail the thousand-mile run to Malta was made in summer weather, which gave the lie to the calendar by transforming January into June. Warriors one had last seen in Plymouth Sound, and had forgotten, reappeared on deck with shame-faced grins, and for the first time the complete quintet of ladies graced the dinner-table. Even the baby sprawled about the deck, causing more than one gallant man-at-arms to crash with ignominy and *sotto voce* blasphemy. A sail bath—a much appreciated luxury after the puddles in “Pandemonium”—was rigged each morning on the upper deck, and every evening on the poop we played the old sea games, “Sling the Monkey,” “High cockalorum, jig, jig, jig,” and “Walk, my lady, walk.” The first-named, though a side-splitting entertainment for the spectators, is of so painful a nature for the “Monkey”—a rôle each player must sustain in turn—that a minute after first witnessing it I unostentatiously returned my knotted handkerchief to my pocket and faded into the background. The breaking of a midshipman’s arm soon afterwards brought the

game to a premature end, and "Sling the Monkey" thenceforward declined in popularity.

Of all the links in our wide-flung chain of outposts I was destined in after years to know Malta best, and I shall have more to say of that historic island presently. My first impressions were, I fear, a trifle blurred: for half a dozen ships of the Mediterranean Fleet lay in the Grand Harbour, and I encountered so many old ship-mates and comrades all bent on hospitality that the single day of our visit was a somewhat hectic one. Yet I found time to note the old-world dignity of the fortifications and the palaces of the Knights Templar; to drive in a blinding glare between stone walls and along a dusty ribbon of road, a combination which constitutes the Maltese "country"; to visit the Baked Monks—horrors no longer shown to the public since one of them fell from his niche with disastrous results upon a lady—and to view the mural paintings, the work of bygone officers, at the Main Guard.

The walls of the various main guardrooms of the Empire were in those days covered with drawings and paintings, the efforts of military artists who found time heavy on their hands. They ranged in merit from the type of crudity scrawled by urchins on back doors to an occasional work of real talent, and as an instance of the latter I recall particularly in the guardroom at Chatham a life-size head in oils of Maud Branscombe, a popular comedy actress of the early 'eighties. It was the practice of an unappreciative War Office periodically to whitewash the guardrooms, when the works of art suffered the same fate as the crudities; but, at the date of which I am writing, the Main Guard at Malta had long escaped the attention of the Philistines, and several fine paintings were still preserved there. The most notable was that of a full-size skeleton, a masterpiece of anatomy, stretched in a niche depicted on the wall, and overrun by rats which were painted with a realism almost terrifying. The popular time to view

it was the evening, for in the flickering light of a gas-jet the rodents appeared to move. Who the morbid artist was I have forgotten, but for some years his gruesome nightmare drew many a visitor to the Main Guard in Valletta.

Of all my first impressions of Malta the most vivid, I think, is that of a visit to H.M.S. *Thunderer*, one of the ships in the harbour, on board which I dined that evening. For she was a big sister of the *Hecate* of impious memory, and was the first man-of-war I had seen fitted with the electric light.

The most treacherous sea on the planet lived up to its reputation on our last thousand miles' lap by suddenly changing from the smiling tranquillity of June to the scowling anger of January. The wet decks and heavy rolling of the ship quickly sent the seasick soldiery back to their bunks and hammocks, where the greater part of them remained till, some four or five dawns later, we rounded the breakwater at Port Said, and came to rest on the threshold of the golden East.

CHAPTER IX

In the China Seas.

PORT SAID, with its colour and tawdry gaiety, its hangdog air of hidden wickedness, always reminds me of an old *roué* with buttonhole, fancy waistcoat, and a leer that hints at disreputable nocturnal practices. Whether its reputation as the wickedest spot on earth is justified is a matter I leave to the judgment of those better qualified by experience to judge; but I fear that the mere reputation thrilled many of us whom the decorum of an English minster town would have left quite cold. And with that fortunately we had to be content, for the Port Said we saw wore—with its tongue in its cheek, one thinks—its thin morning wrapper of respectability. Policemen in yellow-braided tunics, red fezes, and white knickerbockers reaching to the ankles, made up by officious daylight interference for their effacement during the night; pariah dogs roamed the streets and gardens in quest of obscene breakfasts; a smirking dragoman in scarlet and orange whispered of unorthodoxies and received a British kicking; a jaded orchestra of bedizened Bacchantes, who had obviously been up all night, still thrummed their advertisement of a *café* of which the name was the one innocent feature. Of Port Said after nightfall the less said the better, and by that time happily the *Tamar* was tied up to the Canal bank a score of miles distant, and we were virtuously stretching our cramped limbs by a sprint along the “towpath” before turning in.

Our passage through the Suez Canal was a more

leisurely business then than is possible in these days when the world races on its top gear. Lacking electric light, we had perforce to tie up for the night like any Basingstoke barge, and many daylight hours were spent in awaiting the slow advent of some ship, whose masts for long seemed to be stationary beyond the horizon sandhills. When at last she appeared at the distant point where, in defiance of Euclid, the two parallel banks of the Canal obviously met, she was greeted with ironical cheers, and, on passing us, with still more ironical badinage. Yet, if our progress at the regulation speed of five knots (plus many bars' rest) was tedious, there were a hundred novel incidents of desert life to interest us. Caravans of camels; Mecca-bound pilgrims awaiting a ferry; a group—man, woman, child, and donkey complete—recalling pictures of the flight of the Holy Family; signal stations, each in its tiny oasis of green, remote from one another and isolated in the desert, yet with half the world's traffic continually passing before their windows. And there was the epic of the fishing party.

Lured by the lying legend of fish in the Canal, and to vary the monotony of one of our interminable waits, a misguided party of enthusiasts left the ship in a boat with a seine net, which, having cast in the turgid channel, they proceeded in due course to haul to the bank. But the weight soon proved too much for their strength: here was a catch indeed, and, filled with high hopes, they signalled for extra hands from the ship. The reinforcement came, saw, and conquered: the net was drawn close, taken up the bank with a run, and revealed—a dead camel! In life he is neither a lovely nor pleasant animal: one would not willingly sleep within a mile of him. In death he is—unspeakable, and the language which greeted the return of the adventurers was no less unprintable. For the whole world reeked of defunct camel, and the reek seemed to go with us all the way to Suez.

The passage of the Red Sea was less eventful than Pharaoh's, and the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb were negotiated without tears—if one does not reckon those of the baby, who chanced to be cutting a tooth. The island of Perim, one of its gaunt gateposts, and at certain seasons a veritable inferno of heat, was formerly garrisoned by a subaltern's guard. Now, the average British subaltern is a hardy animal, and a dead one is as rare as a dead donkey. But there is a legend that some years ago the subaltern on Perim—a weakling, one thinks—succumbed to the heat, and, in Biblical phrase, “went to his own place.” Soon afterwards, as the story goes, he began to haunt his family, who, unable to grasp what the poor ghost wanted, consulted a medium. The mystery was then solved. The defunct subaltern, after his sojourn on Perim, found his new quarters chilly, and had returned for a blanket!

Aden being in the Bombay Presidency, many of us got our first glimpse of the Indian Empire on sighting its extinct volcano. Every gradation of racial colour between the red and white of the Englishman and the ebony of the Nubian is to be seen on that torrid cinder heap—the prison of a “happy family” restrained from cutting each others' throats by that remote but very potent god, the British Raj. Like all the Orient, Aden is a riot of brilliant colour, though lacking the value of a green background for the chromes and vermilion of its lightly draped crowd. Of shade—sylvan at least—there is none, and the sand and fine lava dust create a thirst which explains the extreme solicitude with which the famed rain-water tanks are regarded. And since, under normal conditions, it rains but once in two years, one gathers that teetotallers are none too popular at Aden.

If the eight days' run down the Indian Ocean to Colombo provided no more exciting incidents than glimpses at long intervals of an islet with three palm-trees, a row of extinct volcanoes like black fangs sticking

out of the sea, and Cape Cormorin, the southernmost point of India, we at least had ample leisure to complete our stocktaking of each other. My cabin mate in "Pandemonium" was a subaltern of the Royal Engineers, who lulled me to slumber each night with scientific information no one but a sapper would ever wish to know. If I commented on the heat, he would instantly quote the temperature necessary to melt platinum wire, and during the voyage he read Whitaker's Almanack from cover to cover without skipping a line.

Saving this itch to impart scientific knowledge, I personally found him a peaceable enough shipmate, though a feud between him and a subaltern of the Argyle and Sutherlands, which began at Plymouth, lasted till they separated at Hong-Kong. It appeared that the cautious sapper, arriving on board betimes, descended to his allotted cell in "Pandemonium," piled his light baggage on the only one of the two bunks which contained bedding, and spent "the end of a perfect day" at the Biological Museum in Plymouth. Returning to the ship at 11 p.m., he found his kit transferred to the bare bunk, and the Highlander, in a state of stertorous unconsciousness—assumed, one shrewdly suspects, but from which nothing would rouse him—snoring between the blankets of the other. As to where the outwitted sapper slept that night I have no certain knowledge: all that he would tell me was that his demand for the issue of bedding at that hour was regarded as an outrage by the naval authority. A hectic meeting between the belligerents at dawn was followed by a day of armed neutrality, but in the evening—our first at sea—hostility broke out afresh.

The Highlander, having washed when dressing for dinner, drew the plug from the basin, and precipitated the soapy water into the sapper's dress-boots, which that officer's servant, unversed in the ways of the sea, had inadvertently stowed in the cupboard beneath in place of the orthodox receptacle. Convinced that his

enemy had acted from malice aforethought, the victim lodged a complaint with the Captain, a maritime Solomon who decreed that the antagonists should be separated, the sapper to be billeted with a Marine (myself) who understood the subtleties of ship's furniture. Anyone who keeps my books by his bedside to read himself to sleep with may have met the ill-paired cabin mates in a story called *Under the Hurricane Deck*.

The night before we arrived at Colombo, and while we were still a hundred miles off the island, the "spicy breezes of Ceylon" fanned the ship like the faint scent from an English garden on a summer's night in rain. I have smelt the peat smoke of Ireland before sighting the coast, but in each case, of course, a strong wind was blowing off the land. The following day a boisterous crowd of us carried out the usual globe-trotter's programme, visiting the Cinnamon Gardens, lunching on curried prawns at Mount Lavinia, and, in common with a thousand other seafarers, were grateful to the gods for setting that tropical paradise midway such widely sundered havens as Aden and Singapore.

That first voyage through the Straits of Malacca—I have made it several times since—left an impression on my mind of emerald forests, of mountain peaks violet against the evening sky, of Chinese junks and other picturesque shipping, of islands sewn like jewels on the belt of sapphire sea. Yet Nature's smile as often as not masks a hidden cruelty, and things, as the poet reminds us, are not always what they seem. Death by pestilence and in a hundred hideous shapes lurked in the forests; sharks infested the sapphire sea; murder, waiting on opportunity, sailed in more than one seemingly innocent junk and praow, while in the form of snake-bite, the emerald islands held a concealed poison much as the jewelled rings of the Medici held it.

On passing Asheen head we crossed the boundary line between the East Indian and China stations, and a week later I joined the *Constance* at Singapore.

The China seas brim with adventure, and I had not long to wait for my first dip of it. While the ship was lying in the roadstead a serious riot broke out among the Chinese on shore, who resented a new law restraining them from blocking the pavements with their wares. They began to wreck the town, and, as half the ship's company were on "general leave" that afternoon, I was sent on shore with the Marine detachment to round up the sailors and bring them off to the ship.

I have seen less hectic episodes on a sensational film. At every corner the Sikhs were firing down the streets, while the Chinese bombarded them and us with tiles from the roof-tops. To dodge the bullets and the missiles in the equatorial heat gave us all the exercise we wanted, and our refractory shipmates kept us continually on the run. They had been ashore just long enough to dig themselves comfortably into the various drinking saloons, and to swallow sufficient poison to make them quarrelsome. They profanely resented being dragged from the temples of Bacchus before the god had even begun to nod, and, like the slippery fish they were, they would constantly escape through the meshes of the military net I had spread for them, and we had to begin all over again. By degrees, however, I edged them all down to the water-side and into the waiting boats, without any casualties, fortunately, from either brickbats or stray bullets. And thankful enough I was, you may be sure, to get them safely on board again, after that long and very warm afternoon's pressgang job.

Between the hour I joined the *Constance* at Singapore and the hour we paid off at Devonport were compressed the happiest eighteen months of my sea life. A smart yet comfortable little ship, the cheeriest of messmates, one of the best Captains in the service, and all about one the magic of the China seas, the romance and glamour of the Far East! What more could a subaltern

of Marines, with memories of the *Valiant* and *Hecate* and northern gales, desire? I saw the China coast from the Gulf of Tartary to Borneo—points 3,200 miles apart; the greater portion of that exquisite fairyland—it has greatly changed since then—the Empire of Japan; the Philippines sweltering in the tropic heat; the snow-clad mountains of Korea; the original willow-pattern bridge at Shanghai; Fusi-yama in the moonlight; a tiger swimming in the gorges of the River Min at dawn. A commission, too, packed with adventurous episodes, which come pattering into the memory like brightly tinted autumn leaves into an arbour, but which, from exigencies of time and space, must be ruthlessly swept aside by the gardener.

Yet one or two, refusing to be dislodged, must perforce be added to the leaves of this chapter. There is, for instance, the episode of the Korean chief's portrait, of which, as the painter, I am (I hope pardonably) proud. On the island over which he held sway is one of those little derelict cemeteries of the British Navy, which one finds in the most unexpected corners of the earth, and whose tombstones frequently record some long forgotten tragedy. In this instance the tiny graveyard had been damaged by a typhoon, and the Admiralty, hearing of it, ordered the Captain of the *Constance* to treat with the chief for the future care and maintenance of the graves.

In due course we anchored off the island, and the chief and his retinue, a picturesque crowd of tatterdemalions, came on board. The conference took place in the fore cabin, in a corner of which, by the kindness of the Captain, and ostensibly as a secretary, I had been installed to make sketches. But in my haste I dropped my box of colours on the deck, and further subterfuge was at an end. The clatter diverted the attention of the Koreans from the business before the meeting to my half-finished sketch; they crowded round me, seized upon it, passed it with a babel of

comment from hand to hand, and refused to part with it till I promised the chief that I would finish, frame, and present it to him on the morrow.

Behold the Captain and myself the next day, then, landing in state to make the presentation—each of us in full dress, preceded up the beach by native trumpeters blaring on six-foot horns, and followed by the coxswain of the galley bearing the draped portrait now framed in fumed oak by the Captain's joiner. With due ceremony it was hung on the wall of the hut and unveiled, after which the islanders were admitted in batches to view it. I have since had a picture or two exhibited in a Suffolk Street gallery ; but the honour has afforded me far less gratification than that I derived from the voluble admiration of the Koreans, as they compared the features of their chief with those of the water-colour impression upon the wall. If, as is probable, it is still hanging where I left it, it must by this time have attained to the dignity of an ancestral portrait !

There was another occasion, however, when many hundreds of miles from the scene of my triumph my brush in place of applause brought me indignity. We were lying at the time off Manilla in the Philippines, and, attracted by the picturesque seventeenth-century fortifications, a brother officer and I landed one morning to sketch them. Absorbed in our occupation, we failed to notice that a neighbouring guardroom had begun to hum like a disturbed beehive, and that we were the exciting cause. Nor was it long before the bees stung. Dashing across the intervening drawbridge, a couple of Spanish soldiers—rifles, bayonets and bandoliers complete—swooped down upon us, seized our sketch-books, and dragged us before the sergeant of the guard, who promptly locked us into the strong-room.

My companion, one of the Lieutenants of the ship, if an indifferent artist, was a champion stammerer, and his stuttering efforts in Spanish profanity did much to sustain me through the ensuing three hours' purgatory.

In the cramped, ill-ventilated space the noonday heat was suffocating ; the room reeked of garlic, and it was obvious that the Spanish soldiery smoked a brand of Manilla cigar that had happily not yet reached the London market. In vain did we hammer on the door and threaten Spain with the wrath of an outraged England ; equally vain were our demands (emphasised with ribaldries picked up on the Mole at Gibraltar) to be taken instantly before the Commandant. The reiterated word “ siesta ” was all the reply vouchsafed us by the laconic sergeant, and we realised that nothing short of an earthquake would induce him to disturb his commanding officer till the midday rites to Morpheus behind closed jalousies and mosquito curtains had been discharged to the last letter.

Not until then were we enlarged from our noisome den and conducted before the military hidalgo who represented the majesty of Spain in the Philippines. He was suave, apologetic, explanatory, bowed us into comfortable chairs, dispensed sherry and cigars, and showed us, in a word, Spanish courtesy personified. How—he asked, with outspread palms and his tongue in his cheek—should we understand that making plans of the fortresses of Spain was forbidden to foreigners ? His men in an access of zeal had doubtless exceeded their duty ; the sergeant at least (so we gathered from his sudden assumption of ferocity) would be shot at dawn on the morrow. As for our sketch-books, he would do himself the honour to return them, since, on examination, he had found our “ plans ” of the defences quite worthless.

But seemingly not *all* my sketches. For, on opening the book that night at sea, I discovered that several pages of caricatures were missing. I have often wondered whether they were removed by the sergeant who was to be shot at dawn, or by the hidalgo of Spain himself in revenge for my Regiment’s theft of Gibraltar.

When at last the orders reached us to return to

England and pay off, the ship was lying in the Woosung River at Shanghai, and the paying-off pennant was immediately hoisted at the main-royal mast-head. As most people know, every ship of the British Navy in commission flies from the steel pole, which has mostly succeeded that old-time spar, a long narrow strip of white bunting called the pennant; and it is the sea custom, when a man-of-war is about to pay off, to lengthen the pennant so considerably that a gilded bladder must needs be affixed to its free end to buoy it up on the water. The paying-off pennant of the *Constance* was so long that the end was taken ashore in a boat and made fast to a lamp-post some distance up the main street. It was 1,200 feet—nearly a quarter of a mile—in length, and, besides the Chinese crowd, hundreds of Europeans used to come and gape at it. But I used to wonder how many of them remembered, or even knew, that the origin of that pennant was the whip Blake hoisted at his mast-head as a retort to Van Tromp's broom.

To my shipmates in those far-off adventures I have dedicated one of my books, *All the King's Men*, in the following words:—

"The globe has rolled its course about the sun some thirty times since you and I sailed the China seas together in one of her late Majesty's 14-gun corvettes. Through the dim vista of the years one spies again the little ship, now mirrored in some haven of Japan, now under close-reefed tops'ls riding out the gale. Across the gulf of time come stealing in a retrospective hour faint echoes from those purposeful sea-watches—the slatting canvas of a ship in stays, the boom of puny broadsides, the 'Last Post's' wail, and shipmates' cheery voices long since stilled.

"And she herself? A ship of shadows manned by memories! Gone the most feminine type of a Queen-ruled Navy. Gone the majestic grace of sail and tapering spar. And, though her woman's name still

stands amid the sterner nomenclature of a King's Armada, it pertains to-day to a roaring virago, who bears small semblance to the dainty lady of our dreams. Her last voyage done, there fell a pitiful day when the shipbreaker's hammer knelled her ignoble doom, and neither the Inland nor the seven outer seas will know her like again.

"None the less I would have you believe that she still sets her royals on some zephyr-kissed ultimate ocean, where all good ships, their lawful occasions accomplished, assuredly gather. And, since the sea life is for the most part what the captain makes it, I think you would have me include in her epitaph the name of Leicester C. Keppel, the kindly seaman who commanded her, and whose gallant spirit—so the fancy takes me—has now rejoined his phantom ship.

In pace Constantia navis ad anchoras stet!"

CHAPTER X

Monkeys, Tintacks, and Pen-holders.

THE TRADITION OF AN UNCHANGING EAST has suffered during the past few decades many rude shocks, not the least of which has been the overthrow of the ancient Chinese dynasty by a republic. The times have changed so violently that even the impassive Celestial has appreciably changed with them, and I gather that the Chinaman of to-day is a less attractive person in many ways than the honest John of my recollection.

It was the custom then—I am not sure whether it still survives—for a British man-o'-war on the China station to carry a complement of native cooks and stewards, who were discharged to the shore before the ship returned to England. The system was a good one, since it made for economy in catering and ensured excellent service and cooking: for, treat him well, and John Chinaman is (or was) the most loyal, honest, and deft servitor in the world. My Celestial shipmates in the *Constance* were typical of their kind—never in the way, yet always at hand when wanted; flitting about the ship in spotless white draperies, paper shoes, and an eerie silence, till, in the twilight, she seemed to be full of ghosts. Masked as it was by the inscrutable countenance of the Oriental, their sense of humour was a never failing surprise; the goodwill of their British shipmates was returned in full, and when at Singapore the long string of pig-tailed pagans went down the ladder for the last time they blubbered like children.

At the same place, the last port of call on the station,

we shipped several dozen natives of another species, who for many weeks filled the ship with daily comedy and tragedy. I refer to the monkeys, which the ship's company seemed to consider the most suitable form of curio to take home to unfortunate sweethearts and wives. The antics of the little animals (I mean of course the monkeys) as they scampered about the decks, chased each other up and down the rigging, and hung by their tails from the yards, were a constant source of amusement to us, and whiled away many an idle hour. But, one by one, they fell overboard, till their numbers were sadly thinned, and each time the little tragedy gripped one anew by the throat. For, indeed, I can recall few memories more poignant than that of the tiny face, so human in semblance and puckered with despair, as its owner, frantically paddling in the ship's wake, fast dwindled to a speck on the waste of waters. It was of course impossible to stop the ship, perhaps several times a day, to pick up a monkey; and perhaps, after all, their fate in the warm sea of the tropics was happier than that of the half-dozen survivors, who, dressed in fearnought jackets like miniature sailors, lived to experience the rigours of an English summer.

Before the present era of wireless, when a ship in mid-ocean is as well informed of the latest news as a London club, two vessels passing at sea would (by means of bunting) bob curtseys to each other and exchange gossip with the avidity of two old women in a village street. The *Constance* talked to every ship she met between Singapore and Colombo, and the burden of her song was, "Has the monsoon burst?" It was for us the burning question of the hour, for, if the answer were in the negative, there was a sporting chance that we might yet fetch across the Indian Ocean before the weather broke. If, on the other hand, we were too late, it would mean a big variation in our course, and add considerably to the length of the voyage.

Reassured on this point by eastward bound gossips, we reached Colombo without incident, completed with coal, and, with chin on shoulder so to speak, headed across the ocean on a westerly course for Cape Guardafui. Alas! the very next day, in a welter of wind, rain and sea from the sou'west, the monsoon burst, and our hopes of a quick passage home were dashed to the deck! To fight mile by mile, with our limited coal capacity, that long stretch of turbulent ocean was out of the question; reluctantly the ship was put about, and, under sail to economise fuel, we ran down to the Equator.

When asked if I have ever crossed the Line, I wearily reply that I have done so a dozen times at least in one day. For, still under sail, and against the lightest of breezes, we beat across the Indian Ocean at last in the immediate latitude of the Equator, being now in one hemisphere, now in the other. On each tack we crossed the Line, the first slant of the long zigzag being celebrated with the ritual demanded by Neptune on such occasions. I still recall the thrill with which, on the previous evening, I had heard the sea god himself hail the ship, demanding her name and destination, and ordering her to heave-to that he might come on board and drink a glass of grog with the Captain in the fore cabin. I remember thinking how curiously the voice of a certain bo's'n's mate on board resembled that of the sea deity, and I yet recapture in my dreams the interest with which I regarded him as, with crown and trident complete and in the light of a ship's lantern, he scanned the list, compiled by his clerks, of his unbaptised sons. For I naturally figured among them, and knew that in the morning, as the modern phrase goes, I should be "for it."

The saturnalia itself has been described too often to bear repetition. Not being unpopular, I came through it with less wear and tear than others, against whom the rare opportunity was seized of working off old

grievances. Indeed, the gradual disuse into which the "ceremony" has fallen in the Navy is due less to the general decay of old customs than to its prejudicial effect on discipline.

In the neighbourhood of the African coast the ship was snugged down, and, under shortened sail and easy steam, we ran the nine hundred miles between the Line and Guardafui before the full force of the monsoon. The nearer we approached the latter point—the most easterly on the Dark Continent—the more mountainous the seas became, till off the cape itself we encountered the highest waves (I do not say the most dangerous) I have ever witnessed. The spectacle was superlatively grand, and, had we not gradually grown accustomed to it, would have been terrifying. A dozen times an hour one's heart almost stood still as, from the corvette's poop, one watched each mighty comber rear itself up towards the zenith till, breaking in a riot of foam, its crest avalanched down the steep hillside of water to miss the ship, so it seemed, by inches. Nor was the element of danger entirely absent, for many a ship has been overtaken and "pooped" with disastrous results by such a following sea. Our immunity in so comparatively small a vessel and when under sail was due entirely to the fine seamanship of those days, and we rounded Guardafui and gained the welcome shelter of the Gulf of Aden without having shipped more than a ton or two of water.

Yet not altogether without *contretemps*. Ascending the poop one morning to see the monsoon sunrise I chanced to arrive at the moment when the officer of the watch was having his early cocoa. The quartermaster was dispatched to the galley for a second cup for me, and as I took it from him the ship gave a tremendous swoop, and the oily, brown liquid shot through the open skylight of the Captain's forecabin on to his paper-littered table beneath.

Unaided by that prince of humorists, Neptune, I

could not have emptied the cup more neatly and with a deadlier precision of aim had I practised the trick for a month. The Captain being asleep at the time, I sought out his valet, and left him to cope with the situation. But it was characteristic of Leicester Keppel to send me in the course of the forenoon his compliments and a courteous request that the next time I had reason to complain of my cocoa I would send it back to the galley, and not fling it over his Admiralty correspondence !

The *Constance* reached Devonport in June, and immediately proceeded to pay off. It was then that I understood, for the first time I think, something of that traditional affection a seaman has for his ship. For it was with poignant regret that I took my leave of the little corvette with all her memories of the magic East and of a hundred sea episodes that have long since faded from my mind. Her cheery company of officers and crew soon scattered again to the four corners of the earth, and most of them I have never seen since. But before we separated, and busy though we were at the time, one bright spirit found occasion for a final leg-pull of our stammering shipmate, my fellow prisoner in the guardroom at Manilla, whose name (for the purpose of this story at all events) was Buggins.

Meeting his messmate in the street one afternoon the bright one inquired where he was going.

"To b-b-buy s-some t-t-t-tintacks," explained Buggins ; "where c-can I g-g-get 'em ?"

"I'll tell you," said the other, scenting his opportunity : whereupon he mentioned a leading iron-monger's, which was actually hard by, but to which he directed the unsuspecting Buggins by the most circuitous route he could devise.

No sooner was his victim out of sight than the jester dashed into the shop, and, waving aside the assistants, demanded to see the head of the firm.

"And what can I do for you, sir ?" asked that

somewhat ponderous trader, when he had been summoned from his private office in the far recesses of the shop.

"D-d-do you s-sell t-t-t-tintacks?" inquired the customer.

"This is an ironmongery establishment, sir," explained the proprietor stiffly, annoyed at being dragged from his sanctum for so trivial a matter. "Of course we sell tintacks."

"Then s-s-s-sit on 'em!" grinned the sailor, and, before the apoplectic ironmonger could take reprisals, he had darted out of the shop and vanished round the adjacent corner.

Five minutes later, and while the outraged head of the firm was still blithering before a sympathetic staff, the unsuspecting Buggins entered the shop.

"D-d-do you s-sell t-t-t-tintacks?" he began——

Of what precisely happened nothing certain is known beyond the fact that the second inquirer for tintacks shot into the street with an even greater impetus and with more solid cause than the first. Judging from his subsequent predilection for cushioned chairs, one would have said that it was he who had accepted the invitation extended to the indignant ironmonger to sit on the tintacks.

I had now done with the sea for a time, and reverted once more to the less eventful life of a land soldier in a garrison town. I went through a revisory course at the Gun Battery, in accordance with a tradition of the Corps, which presumes every officer and man to be rusty in his sea gunnery after a commission afloat! And, with a view to my near approach, after nine years' service, to the top of the subalterns' list, I occupied my leisure with the drill-book and in re-studying the four military subjects of the Eastney course, an examination in which it was necessary to pass before promotion to the rank of Captain. That water-jump on the path to glory I successfully negotiated in due course, and the rest of my brief spell on shore was filled

with details of concern only to the soldier and not worth recording.

But it may be of interest to the "gentle reader"—of the feminine gender at least—to learn that I found time in the intervals of these sterner pursuits to for-gather with the girl of the *Bab Ballads* whom I introduced in the last chapter. She was the daughter of the Rev. Pender H. Cudlip, Vicar of Sparkwell, a village on the fringe of Dartmoor some three miles from Plympton, and before long we became engaged. But since marriage between a poor parson's daughter and a penniless subaltern would have landed us both in the workhouse, where we should have been relegated to separate wings, the companionship of betrothal seemed a preferable alternative to wedlock as interpreted by Poor Law Guardians. Alas! much water—as much as flows in a decade, to be precise—passed under Plym Bridge before I possessed sufficient means to justify marriage, and all I need say further at this point is that I have ever since had reason to regard my belated wedding day as the golden letter of my life's calendar.

My first visit to Sparkwell was the occasion of some parish *tamasha*—I forget exactly what—and the terms of the invitation from Mrs. Pender Cudlip were to "come out and help to pour tea down the throats of the faithful." This unconventional note from the mistress of a vicarage to a week-old acquaintance intrigued me, and it scarcely surprised me to discover in due course that wife of a country parson was not the only rôle played by its writer. For the lady turned out to be Annie Thomas, the novelist, whose books, in the three-volume form of the period, had a considerable vogue between the late 'sixties and early 'nineties of the last century, and which are even now to be met with here and there on the shelves of country libraries. The lightest of fiction, written with an attractive facility, they appealed to a large circle of readers in a simpler

and more leisurely age than the present. Her method—or rather lack of it—would have filled a more conventional writer with dismay; for, so far from planning her books beforehand, she let them develop themselves, launching a group of characters in the first chapter and making them, as she herself expressed it, work out their own salvation. The story, in a word, wrote itself: her pen ran away with her, and it ran so hard that, in the course of the period I have indicated, it produced considerably over a hundred “three-decker” novels. The desk on which they were written was bequeathed by their author to me; and, though I have used it ever since, I sadly realise that the bequest did not include that ease in writing which characterised the original owner.

Apart from the interest attaching to a novelist, my future mother-in-law was one of the most entertaining women I have met. Her keen sense of humour, ready wit, and remarkable memory made her the best of good company, and, when she was in reminiscent mood, she was well worth listening to. For in earlier days in London she had known most of the great Victorians of the literary, dramatic, and artistic worlds, many of them intimately, and in the drawing-room of the country vicarage I seemed to make their acquaintance too. She had been a close friend of Mrs. Charles Dickens, who held her undivided sympathy in the unhappy dissensions between that lady and her illustrious husband. She had met Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope she especially admired, though chiefly, I gathered, for his contrivance in getting himself overlooked by the Income Tax Collector. Three successive editors of *Punch*—Shirley Brookes, Mark Lemon, and F. C. Burnand—were valued friends, the first mentioned standing godfather to my future wife, whose name she bears. (Her other two sponsors, incidentally, were scarcely less interesting, one being Florence Marryat, the third a lady who had been through the siege of

Lucknow.) George du Maurier, the famous artist of the same journal, and his brother-in-law, Clement Scott, the dramatic critic, she knew intimately, while the two entertainers, George Grossmith (the elder) and Corney Grain, frequently added to the gaiety of the Bohemian gatherings in her drawing-room.

One of my wife's earliest recollections is that of sitting on George Grossmith's knee, as he sat at the piano improvising nursery songs for her amusement. He loved children, and to the end retained much of their *joie de vivre*. I was destined to know him myself in after years when he was presumably an old man, and I recall asking him where I too could procure the elixir of perpetual youth. "In the nursery," was his prompt reply. "If I were to hobnob with my contemporaries, I should very soon look like this." Instantly his smooth face wrinkled, his head seemed to sink into his shoulders, his upright, dapper body huddled loosely in his chair, while his hands shook with the palsy of old age. Even his voice squeaked with senility: the whole performance, though of less duration than a minute, was a triumph of the actor's art.

Among the outstanding women novelists of Mrs. Pender Cudlip's circle—apart from George Eliot, a giantess among pigmies, whom she also knew—were Rhoda Broughton, Helen Mathers, and, most notable of the three, Miss Braddon. For half a dozen women who wrote in the 'sixties, a thousand write now, and my mother-in-law lived long enough to be swamped by the rising tide. Miss Braddon, the friend of her girlhood, and past-mistress in the art of weaving plots, is still read by the elder generation, and I confess that *Lady Audley's Secret*, often as I have taken it down from the shelf, never fails to keep me awake. I cherish the memory of an afternoon not long before her death when I had the honour of drinking tea with the venerable authoress.

The complete list of notabilities whom Annie Thomas

had met, and of whom she used to talk with delightful freshness and originality, is far too long to recount here. Among the painters were Leighton and Alma Tadema, and it was she who took charge of the latter's children the night their home was wrecked by the explosion of a powder barge on the Regent's Canal. Albani, Antoinette Stirling, Santley, Theo Marzials, the song-writer, and Sullivan were musical friends or acquaintances; and she knew Irving, Ellen Terry, Toole, the Kendals ("Mrs. Kendal and her Kendalstick," as she irreverently described them), the Bancrofts, W. S. Gilbert, and a host of lesser stars in the theatrical firmament.

Of Gilbert she always spoke with a touch of sentiment, for at one time they had been engaged to be married. As both have long since passed away, one may perhaps be permitted to relate a little comedy of errors staged for their performance by that arch-humorist, Destiny.

As the most solitary spot in London they had arranged to meet one afternoon at the British Museum, and the lady kept the tryst. But the future creator of *Pinafore* failed to turn up, and, having no use for a laggard in love, as she assumed him to be, she drove home and broke off the engagement.

Years afterwards, when each I believe had long been happily married, they met at a dinner party, and Destiny, his tongue in his cheek, sent them downstairs together. No sooner had they taken their seats at the table than each turned simultaneously to the other.

"Why didn't you turn up?" demanded both in the same breath.

Then Destiny, with shaking sides one may suppose, rang down the curtain on his little comedy. An explanatory sentence or two by way of epilogue, and the play was over. Each, it appeared, had waited for the other at the wrong entrance, and, not being patient

IN MANY PARTS

people, neither had sought nor volunteered an explanation. And, since Destiny's arm would seem to rival that of Coincidence in length, some decades later *I* came into the story as son-in-law to a country parson instead of—as might well have been the case—to the greatest humorist of the age.

CHAPTER XI

I Meet Captain Marryat (by proxy) and Write a Sea Comedy.

OF ALL THE CELEBRITIES whom I met by proxy, as it were, at Sparkwell Vicarage, by far the most interesting to me was Captain Marryat.

In common with a host of other victims, whose successors are suffering from the same twist of fortune to-day, Annie Thomas's father, a Lieutenant in the Navy, had been "axed" on the conclusion of peace after the long Napoleonic conflict. The reaction from the pomp and circumstance of war, in which they had been born and reared and which had tintured all their lives, soon wearied them, and a band of malcontents, including Thomas, joined Lord Cochrane and fought in the Greek interest in that nation's war of independence. It is a matter of naval history that Admiral and officers alike were penalised by the British Government for their rash conduct, and Thomas, though ultimately given a command in the coastguard, was never promoted. Yet one can scarcely regret his act of indiscipline, for his swashbuckling adventure to the Levant bristled with interest. He brought home Shelley's heart after it had been snatched from the flames of the poet's funeral pyre. He stood sponsor to the child of a brother officer named Black, the ship's purser—an incident which would seem scarcely worth recording were it not that Mrs. Black had been the "Maid of Athens" immortalised by Byron. But his chief attraction for me was the fact that he was an old messmate and friend of Marryat.

Thomas's coastguard station was on the Norfolk coast, and the sea novelist lived hard by. Their respective families were brought up together, and the author of *Peter Simple* was especially fond of the little girl who in course of time, as my mother-in-law, told me these details. He gave her her first pony, and she was permitted as a special mark of his favour to sit beneath his knee-hole table while he wrote. He was, she declared, a breathless writer, which I can well believe; for I recall at least one sentence of his which runs to 120 words without a stop. He would fling each sheet upon the floor as he finished it, and the child, unconsciously acquiring therefrom the storyteller's instinct one likes to think, gathered them together in a neat pile at his feet.

I yield to no one in my admiration for Marryat's novels, but the admiration is tempered by a grievance. For some reason best known to himself, the novelist had his knife into my Corps: the red coat of the Marine affected him much as a red rag affects the bull, and, though references to his soldier shipmates necessarily abound in his vivid pages, I have discovered few which are unaccompanied by a sneer. The Marine officer is usually the buffoon of the tale, and I am forced to the conclusion that some unknown predecessor of mine had contrived to score heavily off Captain Frederick Marryat, C.B., R.N. Yet, in the end, Nemesis overtook him: for one Colonel of Marines married his daughter, and I drive stray cats out of my garden with his walking-stick.

The routine of garrison life never attracted me, and I soon grew tired of it. The sea has always intrigued me, and I keenly appreciated the humour of seeing the world at the taxpayer's expense. As exchanges on the sea roster were occasionally permitted, I took full advantage of "doing a deal" with more than one sea-going Benedick who, to my secret contempt in those days, was eager to pay for the privilege of staying

at home with his wife. It was in this way that I laid the foundations of that princely fortune which now enables me to live for nearly half the year in my native and very dear country.

My first experiment in that line of business was a "dud," for it literally stranded me in the old *Indus*, which sat twice in every twelve hours upon the mud off Devonport Dockyard. But I soon had the opportunity of once more playing the benefactor (at a price) to a married brother officer ordered to sea; and with something akin to a Boy Scout's proud consciousness of having done a good turn (and with an adequate cheque in my pocket), I took his place in H.M.S. *Edinburgh*, battleship, on the Mediterranean Station.

The cheque was well earned, for it was the best part of four years before I saw "England, home and beauty" again. I think that during the long commission I must have visited every hole and cranny of that treacherous inland sea, though by far the greater part of the time was spent in cruising among the barren islands of the Greek Archipelago. We always understood, in a vague sort of way, that the Eastern Question was responsible for our exile; in any case I know of many pleasanter places in which to spend the winter months. It is curious how many people picture the Mediterranean as a sea of perpetual blue and sunshine. I have been in far worse weather in the Mediterranean than any I have experienced in China or round the British Isles. Off the Straits of Messina on one occasion the big battleship was knocked about like a dinghy, and the stout torpedo-netting booms ranged along the ship's side—spars as thick as a man's body—were snapped off by the seas like a row of carrots.

We were on our way to Naples at the time to embark the late Duke of Cambridge for a cruise. He was a notoriously bad sailor; the extreme violence of the gale had—to employ a not inapt classicism—"put the wind up him," and he spent most of his time tapping

the barometer and asking us what we thought of the weather. The wardroom officers dined with him in the cabin each night in relays, and, when he was settled in a comfortable armchair with a big cigar between his teeth, there was no better company than the late Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. If some of his stories turned the electric light blue, they were always witty and were told with the artistic instinct of the born raconteur.

Of the surviving officers of the Mediterranean Fleet at that period there must be many who still hold in grateful remembrance that exceedingly popular hostess, Mrs. Blunt, wife of the British Consul-General at Salonika. Whenever the squadron visited the benighted town she and her husband—there were nieces too—kept open house; and, since many of us had scarcely seen, and had certainly never spoken to, a woman for months, the consular tea-table beckoned us like the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. Charming as the younger ladies were, it was the chate-laine who held the stage, and I have seen, hanging on her words, a group which included a midshipman and the Commander-in-Chief himself. For Mrs. Blunt knew more, probably, of the mysteries of the Ottoman world than any other Englishwoman living; she had the gift of many tongues, could pass unchallenged as a Turk, and possessed—so it was whispered—an intimate knowledge of the inner life of the imperial seraglio. She had on one occasion been captured by brigands, who, discovering her identity, had instantly released her with handsome apologies—not because she was the wife of the British Consul-General, but because she was Mrs. Blunt. Add to these consular lures a genial personality, a keen sense of humour and dramatic instinct in telling a story, and you will understand why her drawing-room was always crowded. Nor should I fail to mention the incidental attraction of a book of cigarette papers for the use of her guests and a bowl of

golden tobacco from the Sultan's private factory—a tobacco fit for the gods (if they have yet acquired the habit) and unobtainable elsewhere outside Elysium. This entertaining lady had embodied her unique knowledge and experience in a manuscript which, judging from her drawing-room confidences, would have considerably added to the gaiety of nations had it been printed. But, while awaiting dispatch to a publisher, a fire broke out at the Consulate; parties were landed from the squadron then lying off the town, and the blue-jackets did yeomen's work in salving the consular ironmongery. Fenders and pokers were passed from hand to hand with meticulous care, while the fine library burnt merrily, and the labour of years—the manuscript with its wealth of intriguing information—was reduced to tinder by the flames.

I was dining one night at the Consulate when Lord Charles Beresford, then the Captain of the *Undaunted*, was the principal guest. A particularly good-looking parlour-maid, who was handing round the soup, at once caught his roving eye. His conversation grew more and more desultory; his face wore the expression of a man trying to recall an elusive likeness. Then, in the middle of a sentence, he sprang to his feet, while the parlour-maid fled with a whirlwind of skirts through the open door. "You young rascal!" he laughed, shaking his fist after "her." "I'll stop your leave for a month for this! Dashed if she isn't one of my own midshipmen!" The joke had been stage-managed, though with extreme reluctance on the unhappy midshipman's part, by a niece of the house for whom he cherished a youthful passion.

Byron's eulogy of the Greek islands may have been justified by the facts in his day, though the sceptic is probably nearer the mark in setting it down to poetic licence. To us the Archipelago was the abomination of desolation; the author of *Childe Harold* may have seen it in its virgin mantle of green, but generations

of predatory woodcutters and browsing goats have long since reduced it to a wilderness of scrub, and we saw it for the most part in all its winter bleakness.

After perpetually threading our way for months on end through the maze of barren islands—there were of course rare relics of a former beauty—the ship's track-chart resembled a tangle in red silk, and we yearned for the open spaces of the sea and still more for the civilisation which lay beyond.

To vary the monotony of our exile I recruited a company of players from the lower-deck, and wrote a burlesque for their performance when we should ultimately return to Malta. The irksome conditions under which it was conceived roused a spirit of mutiny which I fear pervaded the script; its very name—"H.M.S. Missfire, or the Honest Tar and the Wicked First Luff"—indicated its Bolshevik character, and indeed the whole *motif* was hilariously subversive of discipline. The tuneful music composed for it by the ship's bandmaster, Giovanni Nifosi, the eighteenth-century setting, and the wild impossibility of the action, alone saved me in the end from being shot at dawn in the courtyard of the Admiralty.

But the sailor comedians, in stage jargon, "simply ate it," and in casting the play I encountered my first snag. For they all wanted to play the part of the Honest Tar and experience the joy of kicking a First Lieutenant down the hatchway. Allotting the female characters was even more harassing; for, though with judicious padding and bracing it was possible to achieve a passable semblance of the feminine figure, the feet of the British bluejacket defied every effort in the art of disguise. The "ladies" of my company seemed to be all feet, and the more one compressed their "upper works" the more prominent the former seemed to become. They called for notice even in the gloom of the flats in which we rehearsed; in the full glare of the footlights they positively shouted.

These trials of the author and producer, however, were bagatelle compared with those of the composer. Not one in ten of the sea artistes could read a note of music, and the majority of the remainder seemed to have been born tone-deaf. Nifosi, an excitable Sicilian, wept copiously at each rehearsal, and he was on the verge of a serious breakdown when I hit upon the following device.

After an exhaustive voice test, which suggested feeding-time at the Zoo, I contrived to sort out the alleged tenors from the basses, and from the trebles a type of vocalist who described himself as "singing seconds," but who on further experiment actually moaned in imperfect thirds. These four groups I shut up for some hours each evening in separate watertight compartments, drilling each in its own vocal part till not even a jazz band—had such a barbarism then existed—could have shaken them by one semitone from the score. This point reached, I opened the doors of the compartments, and made trebles, altos, tenors, and basses sing in hearing of each other. As I listened to the result I felt like an experimental chemist who has mixed four volatile elements and finds himself still intact. The effect indeed was so surprisingly good that it created in the minds of the brilliant audiences, who presently heard it at Malta, an entirely false impression that the picked musical talent of the fleet had been drafted to the *Edinburgh* for the event.

But if a little to seek in musical and dramatic finish, the "Missfire" company rose to the occasion in the matter of costumes and wigs, which were all made in the ship. In those days the bluejacket cut out and machined his own clothes; every tar was also a tailor, and it was a simpler business for him then than it would be now to construct the eighteenth-century dresses from the watercolour designs I made for his guidance. I also painted the scenery, while the posters, with which sandwichmen perambulated the streets of Valetta

for some days before the initial performance, were designed and executed by Major Baden-Powell, then Military Secretary, and now the world-famed Chief Scout.

The first of the ten performances to which the burlesque ran in Malta caused something like a sensation. In later years, as will appear, I wrote for, and was brought into intimate touch with, the professional stage, and I now shudder at that crude and immature effort of my youth. But nothing quite like it had been done before ; it was a daring, if boisterous, travesty of the foibles of the Navy, and the great Service audience rocked with mirth as the preposterous sea comedy unfolded itself. Yet there was one member of the audience who, like Queen Victoria when she heard the subaltern's story, "was not pleased." On returning to the ship after the show, I was informed that the Captain wished to see me, and I duly presented myself in his cabin.

Captain Brackenbury was a distinguished officer, a musician, a linguist, and a character of refreshing originality. We had much in common, and were as friendly as the Captain of a man-of-war and the Captain of her detachment of Marines can reasonably expect to be. But on this occasion I think he would have gladly treated me as Drake treated Mr. Doughty of the *Golden Hind*."

"I have just seen your play!" he shouted, "and I think it is the most disgraceful thing of its kind I have ever witnessed! It ought to be burnt by the common hangman! The Commander-in-Chief tells me he is going to see it to-morrow night. If he does"—here he banged the table—"you will be tried by court-martial for writing it, and I shall get rapped over the knuckles by the Admiralty for allowing it to be performed."

But my faith in Sir George Tryon's sense of humour was greater than that of the choleric Captain's—a

faith which was fully justified the following evening, when from the wings I saw him leaning back in his chair, the tears of mirth running down his face. And behind him I noted another face, also wreathed in smiles.

When I returned on board that night I was again sent for by the Captain.

"I was in the Commander-in-Chief's box to-night," he began.

"I saw you, sir," said I, with a grin I could scarcely restrain.

"Yes," he continued, "your play improves on acquaintance. On second thoughts I have come to the conclusion that it is really quite a clever bit of work. Have a nightcap?"

I had it, and so, thanks to an Admiral's laughter, went the more happily to bed.

CHAPTER XII

I Witness a Great Sea Tragedy.

HAD a LANDSMAN BEEN BLINDFOLDED, taken on board the *Edinburgh*, and ushered through the entry port of her half-deck, he might reasonably—the handkerchief being removed from his eyes—have supposed himself to be in the houseboat of a multi-millionaire. That airy enclosed space beneath the poop blinked with white enamel paint and goldleaf; a double row of coloured curtains screened the open doorways of the officers' cabins; the rails and stanchions of the hatchways gleamed like burnished gold, while silver divinities upheld the bulbs of the electric light. Here at all events was little to indicate the war-junk, save the presence of the sentry on the Captain's door.

On deck, and indeed throughout the ship, this lust for paint and polish ran riot. The fore and after superstructures dazzled the eyes with their glistening whiteness, a whiteness emphasised by the broad band of vivid scarlet which encircled it. The long gleaming necks of the guns which craned from the turrets were capped with tompions that were triumphs of brasswork. It was small wonder that, in the matter of decoration, H.M.S. *Edinburgh* was regarded as the show ship of the Mediterranean Fleet; and at tea-fights and dances on board one was not a little proud of being one of her showmen. From the tea-fight point of view it was magnificent; Bellona's scowl was prettily hidden behind a painted mask. But it was not war.

Looking back after a conflict that has shattered the world, one recalls with amazement the time, energy, and money wasted in the Victorian Navy on the decoration of the engine of war. It is true that much of the money spent on paint and goldleaf came out of the pockets of Commanders and First Lieutenants, whose promotion chiefly depended on the "prettiness" of their ships, and who, apart from brief intervals devoted to other duties, were for the most part glorified housemaids in trousers. But the number of hours frittered away on scraping and polishing which should have been employed in instruction and drill was appalling, and it speaks volumes for the initial training of officers and lower deck alike that the Navy of the last quarter of a century of Victoria's reign was as efficient as we know it to have been.

Oddly enough, in spite of the ship's elaborate cleanliness and comparative newness, she swarmed with rats and cockroaches. The latter, it is true, were of the smaller variety, being of the size and colour of haricot beans; but what they lacked in dimension they made up for in numbers. There were millions of them and they were everywhere—between the sheets of one's bed, in the soup at dinner, and they ran over one's paper as one wrote. The ship reeked of cockroach, and the reek was in one's nostrils even before one came alongside. The rats were less repulsive and far more interesting shipmates. They formed one of those rare colonies of the old English black rat, which in the course of centuries has been almost exterminated by the brown Norman rodent reputed to have invaded England in the Conqueror's ships. I believe the two species are rarely, if ever, found together, and I certainly never saw a brown rat on board the *Edinburgh*. I confess I have small use for him ashore or afloat, but for his black brother I formed almost an affection. Compared with the Norman upstart he is a super-aristocrat, for his ancestors were nibbling at the corn-

bags of Julius Cæsar's cavalry five hundred years before the other emigrated to England. He wears the black fur coat of an early English gentleman, and I like to think that it covers the heart of a gentleman. For, smoking alone after "lights out" in the dim glow of a ship's lantern, I have watched him at his toilet, washing his face preparatory to a dance round the deck with some lady of his own (or some other fellow's) family, even running between my legs like the fearless, gallant dare-devil he is.

After the ships in which I had hitherto sailed the seas, the *Edinburgh* was the acme of maritime comfort, and not the least of her novelties to me was the spaciousness of her upper deck. In beam, or width, it was a foot or two more than a cricket pitch is long, and—if one omits to count the considerable area covered by the two turrets—was singularly free of obstructions. For the first time in my sea experience it was possible for the Marines to practise with reasonable freedom the elaborate bayonet exercise of the period, though the use of that weapon afloat was always restricted. If the awnings were spread, movement was cramped; if seamen went aloft, bayonets must be instantly unfixed. But the greatest difficulty with which the unfortunate Marine officer had to contend was that of getting the whole of his detachment together for the one hour's weekly drill deemed adequate for their infantry training. Every drill day the Commander or First Lieutenant would be sure to have a dozen plausible reasons for retaining some of the Marines in the working party; he regarded them as labourers; their own officers as soldiers. It was a case of pull devil, pull baker, and the poor devil in the red coat usually went to the wall.

About this time a new physical drill with vocal accompaniment had been devised by some military genius at home, and in due course I received the "detail" with instructions to carry on. On the next

drill day accordingly I explained the innovation to the Marines and told the sergeant-major to begin.

Keenly sensitive to ridicule, and acutely conscious of the presence of a naval audience convulsed with mirth, he roared, “The detachment will sink down on their ’aunches, slowly extending their arms to the toon of ‘Sweet Dreamland Faces’—and what the ’ell is there to laugh at in that?”

The glare of ferocity which accompanied the question restrained the hysterical ranks from actual outbreak till a bluejacket asked his chum what the Joeys were playing at.

“’Ush!” replied the latter in a stage whisper that could be heard all over the ship. “Pore ‘Stripes’ has gone off his rocker. He thinks the Marines are blinkin’ angels, and he’s teaching ’em to sing ’ymns and to fly.”

Although I instantly switched on to the manual and firing exercises, I soon realised that the only thing to do was to dismiss the angelic host and let them finish their laugh below.

Comfortable, even luxurious, as the *Edinburgh* was in harbour or in fine weather at sea, in a gale of wind she was anything but pleasant. To avoid masking their fire her turrets were set in *echelon*, that is to say, one in advance of the other and on the opposite side of her centre line. Each contained a pair of 45-ton guns, the combined weight of turret and ordnance being considerable. The two ponderous masses of metal acted as balances, and, when the ship began to roll in a seaway, quickly worked up a swing that was far from reassuring. In addition the after superstructure—which contained the officers’ cabins and supported the heavy launch and pinnace and a battery of 6-inch guns—was so weak in construction that in rough weather it creaked like a wicker basket. So flimsy was it, indeed, that, with a falling barometer, it was invariably secured to the upper deck by six

massive chains, the clanking of which as they were dragged from below in the night watches were as disturbing to the sleeper as that of an Elizabethan ghost's. Of the *Edinburgh's* behaviour in the great seas of the Atlantic I have given a description in my novel *The Shadow on the Quarterdeck*.

In the last year of her commission a shadow fell, not on one quarterdeck alone, but over the whole of the British Navy. Of a thousand scenes which have long since faded from my memory, one that I witnessed from the poop of the *Edinburgh* will remain indelibly stamped upon it to the end of my life.

On a brilliant June afternoon in the year 1893, the fleet was steaming in two parallel lines towards the anchorage off Tripoli, which lay ahead of us in the purple shadow of Mount Lebanon. The gentlest of zephyrs rippled the surface of the sea, which reflected the blue of a turquoise sky; a summer haze softened the mountains, veiling them in mystery; a silence, broken only by the lap of the water against the ship's side and the throb of her screws, brooded over the enchanted scene. For it was Thursday, the afternoon ostensibly devoted throughout the Navy to making and mending clothes, actually the weekly half-holiday, and half the Fleet at least were wrapped in slumber. Instead of a modern armada bent on a great Queen's business, we might have been an argosy of lotus-eaters drifting on a sea where it is always afternoon. The awakening was sudden and tragic.

Heading the weather line was the flagship *Victoria*, the lee line being led by the *Camperdown*. The *Edinburgh* was next astern the latter ship. Suddenly a string of brightly coloured bunting was run up to the flagship's mast-head. It was the famous fatal signal.

Rear-Admiral Markham in the *Camperdown*, realising that a grave error was being made, at first hesitated to hoist the answering pennant in token that he understood the signal and was ready to comply. The reason

for his hesitation was demanded by Tryon, and Markham requested that the signal might be repeated. This was done, and the Rear-Admiral was in a cleft stick. He had to choose instantly between a refusal to obey orders (with its consequent court-martial and certain ruin of his career) and a compliance which he knew must court disaster. Who of us placed in such a dilemma would have summed up courage, in the brief moment left for decision, to follow the former course? Tryon was the greatest tactician of his age; he rarely made mistakes; was he, to enhance his reputation, about to execute a theatrical manœuvre which he knew to be possible if only by a hair's breadth? Thoughts such as these must, I think, have tormented Admiral Markham's mind; in any case the answering pennant was in the end hoisted to the *Camperdown's* mast-head, and the two long lines of ships began to turn inwards towards each other. Everyone knows what happened. The distance had been miscalculated. The *Camperdown's* ram crashed into the fo'c'sle of the *Victoria*, and in eight breathless minutes the magnificent flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet had turned keel uppermost and gone to the bottom with the greater number of her officers and crew. Out of a detachment of 103 Royal Marines alone, 70 were drowned.

Many a King's ship, alas! met a similar fate during the Great War—more than one likewise on a fine summer's day. But the *Victoria* disaster was unique at the date of its occurrence, and the horror of it shook the civilised world. I can see her now, slowly heeling to starboard, the avalanche of men skidding down the steeply canting deck into the sea; the dense volume of smoke from her funnels pouring along the surface of the water as the great ship lay on her beam ends; now the whole length of her keel as she completely capsizes; then, last of all, the twin screws still revolving as she makes her final plunge.

The decks of the other ships were crowded by officers

and men spellbound by the horror and appalling suddenness of the disaster. In full view of us all hundreds of our comrades had been sickled by Death in a few brief minutes, yet the glory of the afternoon and the beauty of the scene remained unchanged. It was as though we were painted ships upon a painted ocean, and the artist with a dissatisfied sweep of his brush had removed one of them from his canvas. Rubbing the sleep from our eyes, we could scarcely credit the evidence of our senses; for a moment or two the whole fleet seemed paralysed. Then came the rush for the boats, and in sharp contrast to its earlier stillness the afternoon was instantly filled with the clatter of the steam hoists, as picket boats, launches, and pinnaces swung outboards and were lowered into the water; with the creaking of the blocks as the cutters and whalers and galleys dropped from the davits; with bugle calls, the pipe of the bo's'n's mate, hoarse cries of command, and the answering rush of a thousand racing feet. Then—consternation, curses, and as near an approach to open mutiny as I have witnessed in the Royal Navy.

I venture to think that one of the first to realise the fatal miscalculation was its author, Sir George Tryon himself. It was certainly suggested to him, even as the signal was made, by more than one officer beside him on the bridge. But, consummate tactician that he was, he had come to regard his judgment as infallible and was impatient of correction. He could not believe himself capable of so stupendous an error; and, though he must have known that an error had been made, sufficient time was not given him to grasp its full magnitude. Rather than cloud his reputation by going back on his decree, he gambled on the chance of his yet being able to pull it off—and lost. That at least is how I, an eyewitness of the disaster, have always explained its cause, though even the explanation of an expert (which I certainly am not) can be no more than conjecture.

But the intent of the Admiral's second and final signal, "Annul send boats," needs no conjecture: it was as plain to read as the string of bunting itself. He knew how great would be the suction of the sinking ship, how wreckage would presently shoot to the surface from a great depth with the impetus of missiles released from a spring, and he thought of their peril to a flotilla of surrounding boats. He would not risk a greater loss of life than was inevitable. He himself went down with his flagship, gripping the rail of the bridge; one cannot think that he wished to survive. But it will always be remembered that the *Victoria* foundered with that signal still streaming along the surface of the sea, a token that the gallant Admiral's last thought was for the safety of his comrades in more fortunate ships.

Many of the boats of the fleet were already making at their top speed for the sinking battleship when the signal was hoisted. They were instantly recalled by their respective ships, to which their crews returned with deep resentment. It was a severe strain on their discipline, and, as they remained alongside awaiting fresh orders, the murmuring was loud and unrestrained. And who can wonder at it? With hundreds of their comrades drowning before their eyes, in obedience to a signal they imperfectly understood they must needs sit idle like cravens reluctant to risk their own skins!

Not until the last shred of bunting had disappeared beneath the surface were the boats permitted to leave for their work of rescue. Many a gallant deed had already been performed by the men struggling in the water, and many an unknown hero sank into the depths whose self-sacrifice has never been recorded. Lieutenant (now Major-General) Farquharson, of the Royal Marines, saved the life of the Fleet Paymaster, thereby earning the silver medal of the Royal Humane Society. P. D. R. West, a midshipman, did his country an in-

valuable service in rescuing the flagship's Commander, who, when she capsized, was ill in his cabin with fever, and who lived to become Earl Jellicoe of Jutland fame. Yet no individual act, perhaps, exceeded in heroism the conduct of the ship's company as a whole, not a man of whom moved from his place in the ranks till the steeply canted deck made foothold impossible and the order was given at last to jump.

I see it all again—the sea dotted with the heads of swimmers, wreckage shooting to the surface from a profound depth, maiming and killing many, the little group of dazed survivors on the deck of each ship. And, above all, the magnificent calmness of the Navy in the hour of disaster. For, the rescuing boats once more secured at the davits, the dead Admiral's flag was hoisted in the *Camperdown*, the Rear-Admiral assumed command, the straggled fleet once more became two ordered lines, eight bells were struck, the bugles sounded off "evening quarters," and we all fell in at the guns in accordance with daily routine. Nothing remotely suggested that we had just witnessed the greatest naval disaster in the experience of the oldest of us, save perhaps a forlorn little heap of wreckage on each quarterdeck, under the charge of a sentry. That is the Royal Navy.

In accordance with the original programme, the fleet continued on its course and came to an anchor in Tripoli roadstead. But not to rest. For the *Camperdown* had been so badly damaged that for a considerable time she too was within an ace of going to the bottom. From dusk to dawn the artificers of the fleet laboured strenuously to keep her afloat; the night was filled with the clang of hammers, till the tortured ship seemed to be knelling the victims she had that afternoon sent to their doom. And far out in the offing, like a watcher keeping vigil over a bier, a small vessel slowly circled round the spot seventy fathoms beneath which the stricken flagship lay. "Bubbles of air and oil still

rising to the surface," she would signal at intervals. Little else ever rose from that profound grave.

The story of the lady seeing the apparition of the Admiral the same afternoon at a reception in his house in London is well known, though I cannot vouch for its authenticity. But a curious psychic fact of which I can speak with greater assurance is that the whole thing was accurately foretold a week earlier by a fakir in Tripoli. It is well known that every village on Lebanon was on the look-out that day from earliest dawn for the "grievous calamity with which Allah was about to visit the Christian dogs in their warships."

The story was given us by the members of the American Mission in Tripoli; and though, like the rest of mankind, missionaries have their weaknesses, one hesitates to suspect them of leg-pulling in connection with a great tragedy we all mourned in common. Knowing what I do of the psychic powers possessed by the fakirs of the East, I personally have no difficulty in crediting the occurrence.

Five years later I once more steamed over the fatal spot, this time in the *Camperdown* herself. Did her passing, one wonders, stir the bones of the dead men lying on the sea-bed seventy fathoms below?

CHAPTER XIII

A Gold Watch, a Gunpowder Plot, and a Voyage to the Antipodes.

THE MESSMATE WHO OCCUPIED the next cabin to mine in the *Edinburgh* was Lieutenant Carlyon Bellairs, now Commander Bellairs, and until recently M.P. for Kings Lynn in the Liberal interest. We were quiet neighbours who had much in common, for each spent most of his spare time in writing on his own side of the bulkhead. It is true that the subjects on which our pens were employed were as far apart in character as the poles are asunder, for, while I scribbled sea fiction, he wrote exceedingly able articles on Imperial Defence and kindred matters for the high-brow quarterlies. But we both suffered from *cacoethes scribendi*, and, as victims of that disease, shared the uneasy suspicions of our healthier messmates, who had no use for the abnormal.

Although we have never met since, I still regard Bellairs—if he will permit me to say so—as an old friend. Yet I confess I nurse a grievance against him—not for turning politician, since that merely saddens me, but because of the following episode.

At a fleet regatta held in the roadstead of Lemnos Bellairs was deputed to sail the *Edinburgh's* skiff. Before leaving the ship he borrowed my watch, which chanced to be of gold and a presentation one to boot. Half an hour later a cry was raised that our skiff had capsized, and, running on deck, I saw through a glass the upturned boat a mile or more distant with my

dripping messmate astride her keel. The pinnacle was called away and he was brought back to the ship, happily no worse for the adventure. But my presentation watch with gold chain attached still lies at the bottom of Lemnos harbour, whither, being unsecured, it had slipped from his pocket, and whence, alas! his courteous apologies completely failed to restore it.

If the desolation of the Isles of Greece depressed me, the legends attaching to them were at least full of interest. In the island of Rhodes, for instance, I heard a curious piece of history, which I do not remember to have seen in print, and which in any case may be worth repeating.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century, Queen Elizabeth then being on the throne of England, the great soldier, Suleiman the Magnificent, laid siege to Rhodes, a stronghold of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. The adventure does not appear to have fluttered the Templar dovecot unduly; the place was provisioned for a long period; there was an abundant supply of powder; in a contest of Cross versus Crescent who could doubt the ultimate issue? Like the gallant gentlemen they were, the Knights defended their walls with a chivalry and valour that compelled the admiration even of Suleiman himself.

Then the unexpected happened. To the dismay of the Christian garrison, and after a few brief weeks only, the magazines gave out! The great store of powder on which their hopes of victory had largely rested seemed to have leaked away like water from a cracked cistern. For some inscrutable reason—so they piously argued—God had fought on the side of the Crescent, and with philosophic resignation they surrendered.

Now it would seem that Suleiman, if not a Christian, was at all events a gentleman, who on this occasion at least lived up to his soubriquet of Magnificent. He not only permitted his gallant enemy to march out of their stronghold with all the honours of war, but he

provided them with means of transport to Malta, where they eventually settled. But before sailing they hanged upon the walls a traitor, an English knight, one regrets to say, who had been caught intriguing with the enemy.

More than three hundred years passed when one day—I think it was in the 'forties of the last century—a thunderstorm passed over the island, and the minaret of the mosque, which had supplanted the old church of the Knights, was struck by lightning. Instantly the whole place blew up. This surprising sequel was wrapped in mystery till investigation revealed the following facts.

It was remembered that for many years visitors to the old church vaults beneath the mosque had remarked on the presence of black sand upon the pavement. A few grains had been removed; they were analysed and proved to be, not sand, but gunpowder! The three-century-old problem as to what had become of the Knights' powder was now solved. The renegade Englishman, it would appear (he had been Master of the Ordnance), had employed the opportunity afforded him by his office to remove the powder by night, cask by cask, from the magazines, and secrete it where it would be least likely to be sought—among the dead. And there it had lain till, three centuries later, a flash of lightning discovered its hiding-place. I saw the effects of the resulting explosion, which speak volumes for the lasting quality of the sixteenth-century (and probably English) powder.

In January 1894 the *Edinburgh* returned home and paid off at Chatham. England was deep in snow, and, after some forty odd months in the Mediterranean, including three hot summers, we felt the cold intensely. As a protection against the biting winds we even ventured to turn up the collars of our uniform great-coats and jackets; but there was an all-seeing eye—in the matter of uniform at least—on which we had

"THE SHADOW ON THE QUARTERDECK"

not counted. Unhappily for us the Admiral Superintendent of Chatham Dockyard was that Master Tailor "Pompo," whom we last met in these pages as the Captain of the *Hercules*, and down our coat-collars had to come as long as we remained within the marches of his kingdom.

The events of my next three years ashore, one of which I spent at Deal, have largely faded from my mind. In recalling my service career it is the sea episodes which crowd the memory; the intervals of garrison routine seem little more than a neutral background to a gallery of seascapes.

The official relations between the Naval executive and the Officer of Marines afloat were, in my time, a perpetual incitement to the latter to mutiny, and the majority of my brother officers in consequence detested the sea life. For my part the contests with the Commander on points of importance added zest to my days; those that did not matter I simply laughed at. As I always made sure of my ground before I took up the cudgels, I generally scored, and in either case I can recall no instance of enduring ill-will between us. Apart from this inevitable quarterdeck friction, I remember my naval messmates on the whole as the best of good fellows, and, redcoat though I am (or was), for every soldier friend I have to-day I can count a dozen sailors. I should add that the status of an officer of the Royal Marines in King George's Navy is radically different from that of his predecessor in Queen Victoria's, and I have been informed that my much-abused novel, *The Shadow on the Quarterdeck*, has had not a little to do with the change.

While Romance danced upon the sea with beckoning finger, my soul fretted at the tedium of military life, in which the initialing of blots and erasures on official forms filled no inconsiderable a part. I think it was this exasperating waste of time which, more than anything else, accounted for a sudden fit of zeal to

specialise in some branch of my profession. I selected military surveying, and went through a course of instruction in that subject under the Royal Engineers at Chatham. I now see that, in view of my life-long inability to add up a column of figures and get the same result twice, it was rash to dabble with so treacherous a science as trigonometry. Anyhow, out of a class of about fifty, a young Guardsman and I alone achieved the distinction of being spun.

Shortly afterwards, having called to pay my respects to my instructor's wife before leaving Chatham, I spent the few minutes before her arrival in the drawing-room in inspecting a long framed panel of miniature water-colour sketches, which stretched the entire length of the wall above the mantelpiece. They were labelled in succession: "The Oldest Inhabitant," "The Belle of the Village," "The Vicar," and so on, and a vague sense of familiarity was beginning to steal upon me, when my host entered the room.

"So you've bowled me out!" he laughed. "Well, I admit it was a rotten thing to dish you in the exam., and then pinch all those drawings. I cut them off the margins of your surveys, as you've discovered. You know, your work, artistically speaking, is admirable; from the military point of view"—here he looked out of the window—"worse than useless!"

In spite of that scathing verdict, however, I contrived to pass in the other subject of the course—fortification, after which I returned to (the since abandoned) Forton Barracks, Gosport. But not for long: my spell of military service ashore, which was beginning to irk me, was happily coming to an end, and I was soon back on the sea again, bound for the Antipodes.

At this time, February 1897, the first-class cruiser *Royal Arthur* was being commissioned at Portsmouth to carry relief crews to the Australian station, and I was detailed to go with her in command of the Marines. Once more I marched through the gates with a white-

helmeted draft *en route* for the other side of the world, an event which would have crowded the barrack square of a Line regiment with cheering comrades, but which in our case was as unremarked as though, instead of Sydney, our destination had been Southsea Common and we should be back for dinner. The dispatch and arrival of detachments to and from the four corners of the Empire are almost daily occurrences at the headquarters of the Sea Regiment; the stereotyped ritual is the same whether the adventurers are about to cross Portsmouth Harbour or half the globe, and I have heard the sergeant-major bellow, "Form-fours—right! To Bermuda, 'Ongkong, and the Cape of Good 'Ope—quick march!"

As, headed by the band and muffled in greatcoats, we ploughed our way seawards through the mud, the quaint title of a fairy tale, "To Tell the King the Sky is Falling," kept jingling in my head. For the Clerk of the Weather, bent one liked to think on softening any reluctance we may have felt at quitting our native country, had contrived for our entertainment one of the finest February-fill-dyke waterwork displays I remember. The houses across the street had the appearance of a harlequinade backcloth seen through the water-curtain at the close of a Christmas pantomime, and each umbrella-sheltered passenger walked inside a little dome of crystal. By the time we reached the ship, which was berthed alongside the Dockyard across the harbour, and whither we were conveyed in tugs, we were as near a wash-out as that amphibious animal, the Marine, can well be.

But we were afforded scant leisure to grumble at the deluge. A man-of-war in the throes of commissioning is a pathetically helpless thing without her complement of Marines, and the sea phraseology with which we were hailed from afar betrayed it. Like a trail of ants carrying grain, the detachment with their kitbags clambered over an intervening lighter and up

the cruiser's side to muster on the quarterdeck, our parade-ground for the next two months to come. The ship was crowded with hurrying officers and men, littered with baggage and stores, and rained upon like Noah's newly commissioned ark; yet, with a celerity that would have bewildered a land soldier, the Marines were told off to their respective messes and duties. Within an hour their arms and bags were stowed in the carefully tallied racks, their scarlet marching-order kit exchanged for the seafaring blue serge, and a platoon of the Regular Army was transformed into the sentries, orderlies, waiters, post-men, lamp-trimmers, butchers (red-coated bakers and candlestick-makers would also have been forthcoming had they been required) of a seagoing man-of-war! And, in case of emergency, the change back to a force of perfectly equipped and disciplined land soldiers would have been as expeditiously accomplished.

No less inspired a sea-pen than that of a Smollett or a Marryat could adequately describe the commissioning of a modern man-of-war. It is as though a man, seeking information in a strange hotel, were jostled the livelong day from the basement to the attics by hundreds of new arrivals bent on the same quest. Up and down the ladders, through the flats, along decks whose names would have sorely puzzled the authors of *Roderick Random* and *Peter Simple*, swarmed the officers and men of the several trades and professions embraced in the crowned monogram "R.N." When gentlemen meet, says the saw, compliments pass. "Why don't you take a reef in them blinkin' feet o' yours?" inquires a limping tar, who has tripped over the ammunition boots of a Marine sentry. "If you're so blanky blind," comes the prompt and courteous retort, "why don't you buy a little dorg to lead you?" But through the madness ran a hidden method, and every piece of the jumbled puzzle was speedily wedged into the only space that fitted it.

In less than a week the ship was ready to take the sea, which she presently did in a manner justifying her royal name. For her relative power of ten thousand horses raced us through the water—on her preliminary canter at least—at a speed of nineteen and a half knots, and we seemed to have barely left the King's Stairs before we were rounding Ushant light, the first post on the long course to Sydney.

I think that, in the matter of weather, that voyage to Australia must have been almost a record one. Although it takes six weeks or more to accomplish, and its 10,000-mile track threads such widely different seas as the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, and South Pacific, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that we might have been towed quite comfortably in an open boat the entire distance from Portsmouth to Sydney. We paid for it on the voyage home, Heaven knows! But, on the outward trip at least, Father Neptune proved himself the gentleman he is at heart beneath his sometimes rough exterior. He came on board, of course, each time we crossed the Line; but, as I had already been baptised a son of his on the previous voyage home from China, I escaped that very strenuous christening ceremony in the *Royal Arthur*. Yet not without some difficulty. For, since the direct route to China does not cross the Equator, Neptune's clerks challenged my claim to exemption. A reference to the records in the ship's office, however, proved that I had not only crossed the Line, but had crossed it twenty times at least.

To steady the ship in the long swell which we encountered in the Great Australian Bight she was put under forestaysail and foretrysail. The unfamiliar canvas seemed as incongruous on the modern cruiser as a crinoline would have been on a girl of the period, and if, as some assert, a ship is a sentient thing, the *Royal Arthur* must have felt acutely the ribald comments of her barrack-drilled crew. I confess, however,

IN MANY PARTS

that I shared the secret pleasure of some of the older sailors in the great bellying triangles of canvas, as I still share their regret at the complete passing of the picturesque sails of our youth.

It is difficult to realise that less than thirty years ago I was at sea in a first-class cruiser under sail !

CHAPTER XIV

Homeward Bound from Australia. I Meet Mr. Rudyard Kipling. In the New Forest.

MY STAY IN AUSTRALIA was all too brief. Having discharged our relief crews to their several ships, embarked their time-expired predecessors, and coaled and re-victualled the cruiser, we found ourselves retracing our course through Sydney Heads almost before we had had time to look round. Nor did the weather tend to mitigate our regret at so abrupt a departure; even as we steamed down the vast harbour the wind began to twang ominous minor music out of our tautly-strung shrouds and stays, and we knew we were "for it." Neptune, like a petulant child, was waiting for us; the *Royal Arthur*—a new vessel—had been a novelty in his playbox of shipping. On the outward voyage, as I have shown, he handled her with gentleness, licking no more than a pound or two of paint off her in half a dozen weeks. But the new toy had obviously worn thin, for, no sooner were we outside the Heads, than he started to kick us about the tumbled floor of his playroom in a fit of childish temper that lasted several days.

Of the many memories of that visit to Australia, the two I recall most readily are the melancholy beauty of Sydney Harbour—a melancholy produced by the prevailing blue gum in the foliage—and the unbounded hospitality of our Australian cousins. The suggestion of remote antiquity in the faces of the aborigines also sticks in my mind; for, if the quartz rock of that

"New World" looked thousands of years older than our Dartmoor tors, the aborigines looked older than the quartz. Nor, before quitting the Antipodes, must I omit mention of that king of sea-birds, the albatross, for he is indeed a most beautiful and wonderful fowl. A man familiar with the Great Bear may well be disappointed with the Southern Cross, but there is something in the aloofness, the serenity and majesty of the giant seagull of the Pacific which grips the imagination. Poised for days at a stretch high above the masts on his fourteen or sixteen feet of wingspread, his motionless white image against the blue canopy of sky suggests a brooding spirit; with the mystery of the ocean all about one it is easy to believe the legend that the albatross and his brethren are the restless souls of drowned sea captains. The twentieth-century seaman may laugh at the tale of the Ancient Mariner: he none the less (if a little shamefacedly) still holds the albatross in superstitious regard.

My last impression of Australia was a glimpse through glasses of the low-lying, much-dreaded Lewin, the cape of storms. It bore a new lighthouse, the lantern of which had first been lit a bare three months before. It was a magnificent flashing light, which produced the optical illusion of a trail of meteors shooting over the horizon. But there was no suggestion of storm or ship-wrecking the evening I saw it, and our interest was soon diverted from the new beacon to a beautiful natural phenomenon in another quarter. This was the setting of the planet Venus. Low on the horizon, in the saffron afterglow of a gorgeous sunset and above a sea spread like a sheet of blue foolscap, she shone with a brilliance little less than that of the rival beacon. The exquisite effect was enhanced by the crescent moon, which hung not far above her; and as the planet neared the rim of the ocean she appeared to grow bigger and redder, until she might well have been mistaken for the crimson beam of a lightship in the

offing. This starshine upon the horizon itself is, I believe, peculiar to the southern hemisphere. Then, as suddenly as the blowing out of a candle, Venus sank into the sea, leaving the Moon to write her sad reflection on the foolscap.

“What should they know of England who only England know?” sings the poet of Imperialism, and in all his virile verse there is no happier line. If a tithe of the colossal sum spent annually in encouraging idleness were devoted to giving a few thousands of our “poor little street-bred people” a holiday trip from Southend to Sydney and back, I think the taxpayer would have less reason to curse the dole. He would certainly get an appreciable return for his money. No more, I venture to think, would the returned trippers yelp at their country’s flag; they would have seen for themselves too much of its ubiquity and beneficent power to swallow any more of the poisonous dope administered by their alien masters. They would have found the whole of that 10,000-mile-long sea lane decorated with the familiar trinity of crosses—floating over five of the seven houses of call, carried on a gaff over his shoulder, so to speak, by nine out of every ten tramps encountered. And had they made the voyage in the year of grace 1897 they would have seen half the world paying homage to it.

In that *annus mirabilis* of the Second Jubilee men from a hundred different points on the great wheel of the Empire were gravitating towards its hub—the little island wrapped in its mists in the Northern Sea. Of every creed and race, in every variety of dress, speaking a babel of tongues, they were hastening along the connecting spokes like a swarm of ants bent on a definite purpose. The purpose of the human ants was to do honour to the venerable Victoria—the greatest Queen (after Elizabeth) in British History—on attaining the sixtieth year of her reign; and as at Sydney we had watched amid wild enthusiasm the embarkation

of the soldierly New South Wales contingent, so three weeks later at Colombo we overtook a mixed detachment of Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Chinese police bound on the same loyal errand. The *Royal Arthur*, with her complement of several hundred officers and men, formed part of the swarm and were following the same trail; indeed, our hurried departure from Sydney and subsequent speed upon the way were ordered with a view to our arrival in time to swell by yet another ship the vast armada presently to assemble at Spithead.

Very hot was Colombo on this my fourth visit, very hot, yet very alluring in its sweet-scented greenery after some 5,000 miles of tropical and sub-tropical sea. March is indeed the island's sultriest month, but the glaring noons serve to make the painted dawns and twilights more enchanting still by contrast, and I fell in love with Ceylon more deeply than ever.

Now, all the world over, Tragedy and Comedy walk ever hand in hand, and, brief as our sojourn at Colombo was, each sister found time to play her part with us before we sailed.

During an evening stroll beneath the palms the roll of muffled drums and the wail of the pipes fell upon my ear, and round a bend of the road came a British soldier's funeral. The tale of that funeral is more than ordinarily sad. On the gun-carriage lay the body of Sergeant-Major Lyne, of the Royal Engineers, who had died that morning, and following it as chief mourner walked Mr. William Lyne, brother, the Boatswain of the *Royal Arthur*. The melancholy coincidence of his arrival on the very day of his brother's death was emphasised by the receipt of a mail the same morning announcing the decease of another brother in London! The employment of two such coincidences in fiction would excite the derision of the critic, but Truth is less handicapped than the story-teller.

Tragedy having played her tearful part, then, let Comedy take the stage with her tale of a Tar and a

Tamil. They were seated together at high noon in a secluded shady spot, negotiating the sale and purchase of certain precious stones—or what the Tamil was pleased to call precious. The bargain concluded, the conversation turned on the heat and the adaptability thereto of their respective clothing. So convincing were the Tamil's arguments in favour of his own that the Tar must needs try on a native waistcloth. To wear for one proud moment a British sailor's uniform had, it next appeared, ever been the most cherished ambition of that man of an alien race. Might he take the present opportunity (on the plea of one good turn deserving another) of gratifying it? He might, and he did—bolting immediately thereupon into the wilderness, whence he had not returned when the *Royal Arthur* sailed. Figure to yourself—since I may not print them—the hard sayings of that deceived Tar, as, girt about the loins with a waistcloth only, he spent the remainder of the day seeking after a Tamil in a uniform of the Royal Navy!

Fifteen weeks to the day after leaving it we were back in our old berth alongside the King's Stairs in Portsmouth Dockyard. In the interim we had crossed the world and back, steaming some 26,000 miles in doing it; had seen many wonders of the deep and beauties of Nature, heard a diversity of languages, endured extreme heat, and—because a man-of-war is no luxurious liner—suffered some little discomfort. But for fifteen weeks I had escaped the soul-deadening monotony of barrack routine, and for that alone, soldier though I was, I was nearly tempted under cover of darkness to dance a hornpipe on the Dockyard jetty.

Before paying off, the *Royal Arthur* took her place in the line for the second Jubilee Review at Spithead, and I like to recall that I played a part, infinitesimal though it was, in both of the historic sea pageants. My memory went back to the *Hecate* and the floating

forest of masts and yards in the midst of which she and her sister *Furies* had looked like twisted volcanic rocks, and it was interesting to note the prodigious advance in naval science and in the growth of our sea power made in ten years. In numbers alone the fleet of 1887 was far inferior to its successor of the second Jubilee; in guns and armour it could not compare, and it was still largely dependent on sail power for crossing long stretches of ocean and for meeting the not infrequent exigency of broken-down machinery. In the '97 armada scarcely a trace of that obsolete power survived, and, though I was modern enough to appreciate the march of events, I was secretly glad to think that I had gone to sea early enough to hear the ancient cries, "Ready about! Mains'l haul! Helm's alee!" and to feel the thrill of a ship in stays.

But the latest battleship in that mighty fleet interested me less than a small cruiser, the *Pelorus*, on board which I was bidden by her genial skipper, Captain Bayly, to meet a certain guest of his. And, meeting him, I found a man of quiet demeanour, whose kindly eyes looked out on the world through large round glasses more noticeable than they would be in the present age of short or war-dimmed sight. If he was disappointingly reticent in speech, one soon discovered that he at least possessed the power of making the other fellow talk, and in recalling the interview afterwards it was disconcerting to realise how one had been lured to babble in the ear of such a pundit. Yet even as one babbled one felt that he was patiently sifting the bale of chaff on the sporting chance of finding a grain or two worth gleaning, and that, if found, they would be cast upon the waters, with the result predicted by the prophet of old. For some time past, in bugle-blaring barracks, or still night watches at sea, I had been painfully climbing the thorny path of literature; my first book had been published, and I appreciated the humour of a Lilliput "talking shop" to Gulliver

scarcely less than the honour of Gulliver's acquaintance. For even thirty years ago his was already a household name in England, and it was counted a red-letter day in the literary world on which a new volume appeared from the pen of Rudyard Kipling. I do not recall having met Mr. Kipling more than once since our first forgathering on the sea, the second occasion being at his seventeenth-century house at Burwash in Sussex. But that, as Mr. Kipling himself would say, is another story, which I shall relate in due course. Meanwhile I treasure a sheaf of letters received at various times from the distinguished author, letters all written in the same delightful vein of humour and each containing some kindly appreciation of my own work. And, since one may be permitted to think that the giant does not stoop to pat the pigmy's shoulder without some cause, I value his encouragement accordingly.

Soon after returning to Gosport Barracks I was detailed for duty at Marchwood Magazines in the New Forest, where I spent a retired yet extremely interesting six months. Marchwood is, or was, the largest naval arsenal in the world, though the peaceful appearance of its low, scattered buildings in the heart of the country scarcely suggests it. Southampton Water laps its sleepy jetties on the one side, the forest guards it on the other; hard by, the weathercock of its spire gleaming above the trees, nestles the village which gives the Magazine its name. A more tranquil pastoral scene it would be hard to find in all England, yet this one masks a power which needs but a flash of lightning, nay, a spark from a hobnailed boot, to deal wholesale death and destruction on both sides of the mile-wide water.

A company of Marines under a captain and a subaltern was quartered at Marchwood, and a force of Metropolitan Police helped us to safeguard that region of potential earthquake. At certain points our respective duties were prone to overlap, and the Ordnance

people, who were supremely responsible for the handling of the explosive material, were a little jealous of us both and sometimes touchy in the matter of official etiquette. It was a position demanding tact from all three Services, and, the demand being greater than the supply, the Marines were subsequently withdrawn. But in my time I was fortunate enough to avoid friction with either Police or Ordnance, my relations with the former indeed being especially cordial. Twenty years later, as will appear, I was destined to work again in comradeship with the Metropolitan Police, and my second association with the Force confirmed the admiration I had previously conceived for it at Marchwood. In talks with my friend the Superintendent and his subordinates, I learned much of their onerous duties and of the severe discipline to which they are subject, and over off-duty pipes I listened to so many romances of the criminal world that, had it not been for my conviction of the omniscience of the narrators, I think I should have been tempted to turn criminal myself.

The one thing that disturbed the serenity of life at Marchwood was the approach of a thunderstorm. At the first distant flicker of the lightning, the first mutter of the tempest, the alarm bell was rung and all magazines in which work was in progress were hermetically closed. Workmen, police, and soldiers then stood by till the danger was past, and the period of enforced inactivity gave us ample leisure to brood on the potentialities of forked lightning in contact with half the high explosives of the British Navy. The whole place was guarded of course by an elaborate system of lightning conductors; but, since the Royal Engineers chanced to be experimenting with them when I was at Marchwood, I felt (with all due respect to that scientific corps) that the lightning was being given an undue advantage.

The drill, discipline, administration, and payment of a company reasonably well filled my days at Marchwood,

and a weekly route march through the forest brightened them like a coloured plate in a book of woodcuts. For the New Forest, with its sylvan beauty and wild life, the mystery of its deep woods and its historic atmosphere, never failed to lure me, and much of my spare time was spent beneath its mighty oaks. I made friends with the picturesque gentleman with the terriers attached to the local pack of hounds, and in his inspired company had many a long run afoot and saw more of the fox than half the mounted field did. Of bird music, too, I learned much from the first of my subalterns, Storey (long since a Lieutenant-Colonel), who taught me to distinguish the varied notes of the feathered choir that sings from Easter to Midsummer in the green aisles of the Forest. The memory of my other subaltern, Harvey, I hold in special regard : for he was not only best man at my wedding, but, twenty years later at the Battle of Jutland, when mortally wounded in the turret of the *Lion*, heroically saved her from blowing up and won a posthumous V.C. The story of his gallantry is too well known to need retelling by me.

It was not very long before the sea called me again and I was back in the Mediterranean, this time on board the *Camperdown* of tragic memory.

CHAPTER XV

An Old Messmate. The Kaiser and the Admiral's Cook.
"Quack, quack!" *The Noble Animal.*

I WENT OUT to the Mediterranean by P. & O. from Tilbury Docks, and picked up the *Camperdown* in the Grand Harbour at Malta, which by this time had grown as familiar to me as Plymouth Sound. And it was a familiar face framed in one of her wardroom scuttles and a familiar voice which greeted me as I came alongside in the daighsa, though I had not met their owner since we had been messmates in the old *Valiant* more than a dozen years before. Horace Ximenes Browne had then been a junior surgeon, who had added considerably to the gaiety of that rain-sodden fold of black sheep; but while the buoyancy of spirit which had characterised the young doctor was obviously still unimpaired, I noted a shade less resilience in the figure of the *Camperdown's* Principal Medical Officer. No doubt he remarked a similar depreciation in mine—a chastening reflection; indeed, since memory will outlive a dozen septennial changes of the body, the reunions of life are not infrequently more tragic than the partings.

I have taken the liberty, of which he is well aware, of describing Dr. Browne (under an *alias*) in one of my books, and I am sure he will forgive me for again introducing him in the present volume. For his was a personality which sticks in the memory as readily as the triplet of names by which he is invariably recalled in naval circles: it created an atmosphere of

laughter, for which, in this vale of tears, one should be decently grateful. His gift of humour went hand in hand with a wonderful versatility. Apart from his professional qualifications, he was an accomplished pianist, who could not only play the instrument with a delightfully crisp and sympathetic touch, but—an invaluable asset at sea—could tune it. He possessed a complete set of watchmaker's tools, and, given a sufficiently confiding messmate, could be trusted to dissect a timepiece, clean it, and replace nearly the whole of its dismembered parts. He dabbled in electricity, and the wonderful contraption whereby he had increased the voltage of the light in his cabin filled the ship with the admiration of the cautious and with the profanity of the unwary who had received shocks. But it was as a marine watercolour painter that he excelled, the drawing of his ships being faultless, the life and colour of his sea masterly. A trifle with pigments myself I doff my hat to my old messmate for his ability to reflect so truthfully the ocean in all its moods. His method, too, was interesting: he would not infrequently sip inspiration from a glass of sherry at his elbow, and I have seen him in a fit of abstraction wash his brush therein instead of in the tumbler of water standing near by for the purpose. I am bound to admit, however, that I never knew him commit the contrary error of sipping from the tumbler.

The mention of Horace Ximenes Browne recalls an incident which occurred some years later, but which may be not inappropriately related here. He was then Fleet Surgeon of Devonport Dockyard, and, on the occasion of the launch of a new cruiser, gave a luncheon party, to which my wife and I were bidden, at his house on the Terrace. In the course of the meal the conversation turned on the recent escape of a convict from Dartmoor Prison, who had beaten the record of such adventurers by getting as far as Penzance before recapture, and I championed the adventurer.

"He was a sportsman," I said, "who deserved better luck."

"He was a dangerous criminal," snapped my *vis-à-vis* across the table, a grim-visaged man whom I had never set eyes on before.

"I'll take your word for it," I laughed, "and he no doubt deserved all he got. But he outwitted a whole posse of policemen well paid to keep him inside the walls, and it is they, not he, who ought to stand the racket."

If ever a man was on the verge of apoplexy it was my fellow guest. He glared at me as though I had been the convict himself caught in his own dining-room, and it was some moments before he found breath to retort.

"You are one of those people," he snorted, shaking the finger of rebuke at me, "who do a lot of harm by sneering at the police and applauding the criminal when he does something spectacular. That sort of thing encourages——"

"No one at this table, I trust," grinned I. But after lunch I took our host aside, and asked him who his choleric friend might be. "He seemed a thought rattled," I observed.

"I don't wonder at it," laughed "Ximenes." "He's the Governor of Dartmoor Prison!"

To another of my messmates in the *Camperdown*, Lieutenant Richard Mahon, I am grateful for many a cheery hour and, incidentally, for much pecuniary benefit in after years. For it was from Dicky Mahon that I drew the character of "Dicky Lascelles" in the naval comedy, *The Flag-Lieutenant*.

While the ship with the rest of the squadron was still at Malta the *Hohenzollern* arrived in the Grand Harbour with the Kaiser and Kaiserin on board. They remained several days, but as a plot was afoot—or was suspected to be—to assassinate him, the Authorities deemed it inadvisable for Wilhelm to land. So far from chafing at this embargo on his movements I think he welcomed

it, for, while the Empress and her ladies went shopping in Valetta, he donned his uniform as a British Admiral and spent his time on board the fleet.

This was some sixteen or seventeen years before the War, when he was regarded by us less as a potential enemy than as a well-wisher to England and a grandson of England's Queen. His charm of manner and air of *camaraderie* with the Navy made him very popular fore and aft, and there is no doubt that he was always a genuine admirer of the British seaman and his officer. But nothing escaped his searching eye, and who will now believe that he was not even then weighing the chances of that armageddon he must have known to be inevitable?

The frequent presence of a crowned head in the Wardroom Mess at cocktail time was undoubtedly an honour, yet it was an honour for which its members literally had to pay. The Kaiser and his entourage were no Pussyfoots, and the repeated entertainment of their illustrious guest soon became, in the flagship in particular, an appreciable tax on the officers' wine bills. A way out of the difficulty had to be found, and the Navy were not long in finding it. A conference was held, with the result that, on the Kaiser's next visit to the Mess, he was approached by a young officer who had been cast for the part by throw of dice.

"I have been deputed to ask you, sir," he grinned, "to consider yourself an honorary member of our Mess during the remainder of your stay in Malta."

With all his faults William was at heart a sportsman. No one laughed more heartily than he as, in the usual stereotyped phraseology, he accepted the invitation. For he knew that an honorary member not only pays for his own entertainment, but has the privilege on occasions of paying for that of his hosts as well.

But there was one man in the fleet who, in the exercise of his art, won the Kaiser's special esteem, and that was the Admiral's cook. As a mark of it the Order

of the Red Eagle of the nth class (or some similar decoration) was conferred on the artist by the imperial *gourmet*, an honour in which the entire lower-deck of the flagship felt themselves implied, and which they celebrated by thrusting their noonday tots of rum—amounting in the aggregate to a generous bin of bottles—upon the hero of the hour. It would have been wiser had the latter thereafter retired to the bunk, hammock, cot, or whatever may be the sleeping-place affected by Admiral's cooks, to roost the covey of red eagles which by this time clouded his vision. But cooks are not always heroes, even to their own Admirals, and this one weakly yielded to the popular clamour that the celebrations should be continued on shore. A daighsa was chartered, and, escorted by as many admirers as she would hold, the *décoré* cook set out for the Custom House steps. He reached them in due course a sober (if not a godly and righteous) man: for, on passing under the stern of the *Hohenzollern*, he had rashly stood up to cheer the Kaiser, and had pitched, Red Eagle and all, into the Grand Harbour, from which he had been fished with extreme difficulty by his scarcely less unbalanced companions.

My two years in the *Camperdown* were very much a repetition of the previous commission in the *Edinburgh*. We again spent most of the time in the Levant, and for the same reason: for since the Balkan region of Europe is always on the simmer, and a watched pot proverbially never boils, we were kept there to watch the pot. It would have been an intolerably dull job had its monotony not been occasionally brightened by such episodes as that of the Admiral's ducks.

Accompanied by one of his staff, the Rear-Admiral commanding in the Levant went for a walk one afternoon, the squadron at the time being at Vourlah. In a cup of the hills high up above the town the two officers stumbled by chance upon the sort of lake one discovers once or twice in a lifetime when one's gun

has been left at home : it was black with waterfowl of every description, and, judging from the tameness of the birds, had never yet been disturbed by the sportsman. It was the chance of a long and varied career. Enjoining the strictest reticence on his companion, the Admiral returned on board the flagship and organised a small and select shooting party for the morrow.

Very betimes, and with something of the stealth of an old-time cutting-out expedition, Sir Robert (shall I say ?) and his satellites landed and eagerly made for the lake of promise in the hills. On the *carpe diem* principle they had sacrificed their breakfast and not a little of their sleep in order to be first upon the scene, and it was naturally annoying to find that they were not. For, rounding the shoulder of the hill, they saw the lake indeed, but a lake as void of birds as a tennis court should be of daisies, while the plethoric gamebags of the seaward-bound party they encountered spoke eloquently of a feathered holocaust. Chillier even than the chill air of dawn in which the meeting took place was Sir Robert's acknowledgment of the sportsmen's respectful salutations. A British Admiral had been outwitted by his grinning subordinates, a crime akin to *lèse majesté* : the offending officers had certainly lived up to the name of their ship, which chanced to be the *Dreadnought*. But Nemesis was not long in overtaking them. I think the alleged offence was washing hung out to dry upon a conspicuous part of the forecastle, or it may have been a boat with fenders lapping over the gunnel. But whatever the breach of naval etiquette which served the Admiral with a pretext, punishment followed swiftly on its heels. The obnoxious ship was ordered to weigh anchor and cruise off the mouth of the gulf, several miles distant, during the remainder of the squadron's stay at Vourlah. And there in the dim offing, like a naughty child banished to a corner, she sulked, a reminder to the rest of us of the sanctity of an Admiral's ducks. In after years,

and in the hearing of a mightier *Dreadnought's* company, one murmured the mystic syllables "Bunga, bunga!" at one's peril. In the case of the *Dreadnought* of this story, the words "Quack, quack!" for months to come produced a similar homicidal tendency.

In this year, 1898, I was so near the top of the Captains' list that it became necessary to bestir myself in the matter of passing for promotion. A garrison class of instruction for all military officers in a similar predicament was about to be held in Valetta; I was granted leave to join it, and, as the *Camperdown* was ordered to sea, I furthermore obtained permission to exchange ships temporarily with a brother officer in the *Royal Sovereign*, then in the Dockyard hands at Malta. For the next few months, then, that battleship of regal nomenclature became my floating home.

I attended the course, burnt much midnight oil in bringing my knowledge of tactics, fortification, topography, and military law up to date, and in due course satisfied the examiners that I had done so. But qualification for promotion to field rank demanded in addition the satisfactory handling of an infantry brigade before a Military Board, and, though I knew my drill well enough, I was less confident of my ability to prove it from the back of that treacherous quadruped the horse.

I have described the somewhat complex training of an officer of the Royal Marines at the time I joined the Corps. Admirable as it was it had one serious defect, and that was the omission to teach him, while his limbs were still flexible, to ride. It is true that one could apply for a course of equitation at the Cavalry Dépôt, Canterbury, and that, provided one's services could be spared, the application was usually granted. But the course should have been compulsory, since those, including myself, to whom the circus stunts of the riding-school made scant appeal, were prone to postpone the evil day to their subsequent undoing.

Now, with one emphatic exception, I love most animals, even without the common reservation "in their proper place." But I hold most strongly that the least desirable place for the exception is between my own legs. My few brief adventures in co-operation with *Bucephalus* have been attended with such disastrous results that I long ago came to the babu's conclusion that, though the horse may be a noble and sagacious animal, when he meets a traction engine "he ceases to do so." The equine intelligence so "mightily cried up," as Pepys would say, by the horse fanatic merely strikes me as low cunning, and if a human being were driven into hysterics by a newspaper in the hedge he would be very properly put away.

With sentiments such as these I embarked at the mature age of thirty-seven upon a private and uninstructed course of equitation. From a son of Ananias at Florian I hired a black pony called "Snowball," chiefly on the strength of his alleged docility in nosing out and eating sugar from one's pocket. Ananiasson subsequently explained that "Snowball" had mistaken my trouser- for my breast-pocket. The bald truth is that on our first introduction the docile animal, taking advantage of my defenceless position with one foot in the stirrup, the other in a puddle, and my back towards his teeth, bit me with so shrewd a knowledge of human anatomy that for several nights afterwards I had to sleep face downwards. The experience at least taught me that before one can mount the noble animal with reasonable safety one must acquire the agility of a circus acrobat plus the power of a chameleon to see behind him.

Nor did a closer acquaintance with the back-biting "Snowball" tend to impress me with the traditional intelligence of his species. In the course of an afternoon's fox-trot with him I awoke to find myself sitting by the roadside with a cut lip and a headache.

“What made him do that?” I indignantly demanded of a Maltese who had come to my assistance.

“I tinka,” he grinned, “dat he smella a pig over de garden wall.”

I speedily realised that that unclean beast was far from being “Snowball’s” only aversion in the animal kingdom. A goat apparently made him see red, while a donkey’s bray converted him into an infernal machine of powerful springs which, on two occasions at least, put me on the sick list. Whether it was one, or a combination, of these *bêtes noires* which finally melted the “Snowball” out of my life, I cannot say, but there fell a nightmare afternoon when, taking advantage of my lighting a cigarette, he bolted with me the entire length of the highway between Cività Vecchia and Florian. The bit between his teeth, the reins swinging dangerously round his fore-legs, his hoofs beating a devil’s tattoo on the hard road, he tore down the straight course as though he had just rounded Tattenham Corner at the Derby, while afar off carters and cabdrivers drew their vehicles in panic to the wayside, and pedestrians shinned over the boundary walls or prayed to the saints ere the demon horseman should be upon them. I think I must have looked the part, for with the seaman’s instinct I had divested myself of everything—cap, coat, crop, stirrups—with a confused idea of going overboard before the final catastrophe. Fortunately, the necessity did not arise, for in the familiar neighbourhood of his stable the Bolshevik slowed down to a walk, which enabled me to dismount and tow him the remainder of the way home from the back seat of a *carrozza*.

The day before the Examining Board assembled on Florian parade I safeguarded myself against any repetition of the demoniacal outbreak by lending “Snowball” to a midshipman, who joyously undertook to take the devil out of him ere the morrow. So effectually did he carry out his mission—I believe he made the circuit of the entire island at the gallop—that

my chastened "charger" in the morning might have come direct from the shafts of a hearse. His undertaker appearance, indeed, drew suspicious comment from the Board: his preference for "marching past" backwards convulsed it. But by a judicious show of annoyance at my hireling's lethargy, and with as near an imitation of the born horseman as I could compass, I ambled nonchalantly from point to point in the line till cruel suspicion was allayed. I was informed that the Board so far were satisfied—so satisfied indeed that, in view of certain dangerous pitholes on the parade, they would dispense with the usual jumping test. I could, of course, jump? I replied with perfect truth that I could, though I did not feel called upon to explain that so far I had never done so on the back of a horse. Very well, then, I might dismount. I did—with an alacrity indifferently camouflaged by an audible sigh of reluctance, and no wile of man or woman has ever lured me on to the back of the noble animal since.

CHAPTER XVI

Palestine. Abdullah on Polygamy. Malta Fever and Crete.

HARD ON THE HEELS of these equestrian thrills the *Royal Sovereign* left Malta for a cruise along the Egyptian and Syrian coasts, and for the second time I visited Palestine. From the *Edinburgh*, four or five years earlier, I had landed at Haifa, the tiny port under Carmel, and visited Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee, crossing the plain of Esdraelon on a spring day when the crops and wild flowers gave it the appearance of a brightly patterned carpet. The long succession of sunlit scenes had suggested the turning over of coloured plates in a family Bible: one met the unmuzzled ox treading out the corn, Bartimæus by the wayside begging, women of Bethlehem with the pieces of silver in their hair, others grinding at the mill. And now, on a few days' leave from the *Royal Sovereign*, I saw Jerusalem, went down to Jericho and fell among thieves (mainly of the innkeeper variety), peered into the deep ravine where Elijah was fed by the friendly Bedouin tribe of Ravens, talked to one of their descendants, bathed in the Dead Sea, got rid of its stinging salt by swimming the neighbouring Jordan, and returned to the ship with an impression of the Holy Land which has coloured the Lessons in church for me ever since. I also contrived to visit Damascus, a more remote city then than in these prosaic days when one can take a return railway ticket from Beyrut. I caught my first glimpse of it from the summit of the

hills, its white domes and minarets gleaming on the green plain, the Arabs' "pearl set in emeralds." I walked down "the street which is called straight" (otherwise narrow), which Mark Twain goes out of his way to explain is "a little straighter than a corkscrew, but not quite as straight as a rainbow"; and seeing the River Abana, which races through the city, I sympathised with Naaman's plaint that Jordan couldn't hold a candle to it.

From Alexandria, where we lay for some days, I went on leave to Cairo, and, *inter alia*, climbed the Great Pyramid. It is curious that, while its dimensions and so much of its history have faded from my memory, a domestic discussion with Abdullah, my guide, philosopher (especially philosopher), and friend for the occasion, should still stick tenaciously in my mind. We were seated together on the apex of Cheops's vast tomb, when—what suggested it I cannot recall—the topic of polygamy cropped up. Abdullah, it appeared, was all for the plurality system of his creed; I, in common decency, must champion the one-man-one-wife doctrine of my own. We shouted each other down, the monotonous burden of Abdullah's argument being that, the more wives a man had, the better his chances of having "him supper cooked and him shirt washed."

In my bachelor innocence, and at the risk of being flung off the Pyramid, I asserted that such duties were even better assured of accomplishment under the one-wife system. Ah, well. An older man (and many a younger, no doubt) would have hesitated to say as much—even to an Abdullah on the top of a Pyramid, and I myself am now in a position to appreciate something of his contention. For I gather that there are more stimulating occupations for the average woman than the sole care and maintenance of her lord's linen.

At Alexandria I picked up a dose of that very prevalent complaint of the 'nineties—Mediterranean, or Malta, fever. It was a comparatively mild attack, yet

in forty-eight hours I was too weak to stand; and, aggravated probably by a severe bout of influenza a year later in England, it left me a legacy of neuralgia, which eventually invalidated me out of the Service, and from which I have suffered acutely ever since. Nevertheless I may count myself fortunate—especially fortunate, though it may seem a curious thing to say that I was perforce a patient on board ship and not in the Naval Hospital at Malta. Had it been the other way about, the odds are that for the last eight-and-twenty years my bones would have been lying in Bighi cemetery.

This opinion must not be construed as a reflection on the Naval Medical Service, for whose care and skill in many parts of the world I have every reason to be grateful. But the story of "Malta fever" is the story of a long-drawn-out tragedy; for, in conjunction with enteric, with which it was often confused, it took a heavy toll of both Services during the 'nineties before the root of the trouble was discovered. That it should have been so long unsuspected is amazing.

During my former commission in the Mediterranean we had had an especially severe epidemic: the fever raged throughout the fleet, then lying in Malta, and Bighi Hospital was so crowded with cases that the *Edinburgh* was ordered to take a large contingent to sea on a sort of experimental cruise. It was my most depressing sea experience. The battleship was converted into a floating hospital; we gave up our cabins to fever-stricken brother officers and slept in hammocks where we could; the mess-deck was double-banked with the cots and hammocks of sick seamen and Marines. The experiment no doubt saved many lives, yet scarcely a day passed without one or more of those peculiarly poignant ceremonials, a burial at sea. Ceremonials, moreover, shorn of much of their familiar ritual: for Jack and Joe are prone to be nervy when ill, and any suggestion of the passing of a shipmate had to be

avoided. The stopping of the engines usual on such occasions was camouflaged by gradually reducing to dead slow, and as gradually resuming speed after a bare moment's pause for the lowering of the body. All suggestive movements on deck were muffled, words of command were hushed to a whisper, and, in place of the customary volleys, the firing party of Marines carried out the last honours in dumb show. A normally conducted funeral is never an exhilarating event : the additional silence of these sea burials gave them the semblance of a series of nightmares.

Now, it had always been difficult to diagnose "Malta fever" from enteric, the characteristic typhoid spots being conspicuous by their absence from most cases of that disease in the Mediterranean. The two fevers, as I have said, were frequently confused, and though the percentage of deaths directly traceable to the former is said to have been small, the mortality from fever generally was appallingly high.

For some years exhaustive investigations were carried out by the Medical Service with a view to tracing the origin of the mysterious disease. One fact alone stood out in bold relief from a background of perplexities. Whether a patient was admitted to hospital with mumps or with a broken leg, the odds were that in due course he developed "Malta fever."

The drinking water was tested ; the water of the Grand Harbour, suspect from the beginning, was repeatedly analysed, and learned treatises on both were compiled by successive medical officers for the information of the Admiralty. Everyone had his own pet theory, and one enterprising doctor conceived the idea of testing the dust of the Island by blowing a tubeful of it down a monkey's throat. Unfortunately the intelligent animal blew first, and it was the doctor, not the monkey, who got the "Malta fever" ! But, beyond adding to its gaiety, even this martyr to scientific research contributed little to the cause of humanity.

The fever cases still crowded the wards, milk was poured down the sufferers' throats by the gallon, and—the sufferers continued to die.

Then someone, who deserved a peerage—many a politician has been awarded one for a lesser service to the State—had a brain wave. Milk ! The milk supply of Malta, including that of the hospitals, was obtained from goats who—then at all events—browsed principally on the garbage of the streets. The murder (literally) was out. The goats' milk was as full of the "Malta fever" micro-organism as an egg is of meat : the long epidemic was amply accounted for. Thenceforward no milk was allowed in the fleet or garrison but the sterilised tinned variety, with the result that the malady has been practically stamped out.

On the *Royal Sovereign's* return to Malta I learned that the *Camperdown* was in Crete. Thither in due course I followed her in a transport which chanced to be conveying a Highland regiment for the reinforcement of the small British garrison in that lawless and truculent isle. The Cretans were revelling in one of their periodical orgies of vendetta and murder, and the administration of their island had been temporarily taken over by an international force representative of Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy respectively. The Cretan insurrection of September 1898 and its repression by the Allies was the outstanding feature of the *Camperdown's* commission ; and, although I have already told its story in more than one of my books, and have embodied one of its episodes in *The Flag-Lieutenant*, I venture to hope that it may bear repetition here. It is too long for detailed narrative, yet, however briefly told, it should not be, one thinks, at the cost of truth. It was for telling the truth too quickly on the heels of the event that for twenty years I was a *persona ingrata* to Authority. It was happily before the to-be-shot-at-dawn period, and I still survive.

For the second time, then, I found myself at sea

with a battalion of Highlanders. To me, as to most people, the glamour of a Scottish regiment is irresistible : the peculiarly warlike suggestion conveyed by its dress ; its eerie, thrilling pipe music ; the traditions—Jacobite it may be—behind it appeal strongly to my imagination. If I could live my life over again, I would be a Marine ; if that were impossible, then a Highlander. I can put my admiration of the tartan no higher than that.

The regiment I sailed with from Malta to Crete interested me accordingly. Within the narrow confines of a ship an intimacy was possible which is less easy of cultivation between the Highland and Southron soldier elsewhere. My admiration was strengthened by the intimacy : I found the rank and file all that my imagination painted, and the officers—gentlemen. In Malta ballrooms and drawing-rooms the latter had been in great request, though I never heard their names overmuch in connection with cricket, football, or polo, and, in spite of my own disinclination for games, the deficiency disturbed me. Still, I liked them all, from the Colonel who explained how he would have dished Napoleon long before Waterloo had he been in Wellington's boots, to the gallant lad who might well have lived to command the regiment in the Great War, but whose days were even then numbered. It was with genuine regret that I parted from them, for the *Camperdown* lay in Suda Bay, and the regiment was bound for Kandia, some three or four hours' steaming farther on.

One evening a few weeks later I was bathing with a party of my messmates in an enclosed cove in Suda Bay, when, obviously to attract our attention, the *Camperdown* fired a gun. Scrambling into our clothes and climbing the promontory which had screened the ship from our view, we saw the blue peter flying from her mast-head, boats being hoisted in, and every sign that she was being hurriedly prepared for sea. We

manned the skiff, and lost no time in getting on board, where we learned that grave trouble had broken out at Kandia, and that a man-of-war had been cabled for.

The ship was in the throes of coaling, but by nine o'clock or thereabouts we got away and steamed at our top speed for the scene of the outbreak. As we approached it we saw the eastern sky lurid with the reflection of a great fire, and dense clouds of smoke rolling up the background of mountains before the sea breeze. I was ordered to have the Marines ready for landing on arrival, and the remainder of the night was spent by the detachment in the familiar process of transforming themselves from the orderlies, waiters, postmen, butchers, lamp-trimmers, etc., of a man-of-war into a company of regular soldiers equipped for active service. The rest of the ship hummed with preparations for any emergency that might arise, and soon after midnight we anchored in the open roadstead of Kandia.

Shortly before daybreak a boat was discerned approaching the ship. On being hailed, it appeared that she was bringing off the Colonel commanding the British garrison (my fellow passenger in the transport and the theoretical disher of Napoleon) together with a couple of his officers; and, while the former consorted measures with the Captain of the *Camperdown* in the fore cabin, the latter descended to the wardroom, and told us (the comments are mine) the following tale.

For some time past the Moslem population had been incensed at a certain tax decreed by the Powers, an impost alleged by the followers of the Prophet to fall more heavily on them than on their Christian fellow islanders. Whether there was any truth in the complaint is doubtful: of the folly of what followed there is no question whatever. At a moment when a fanatical rabble was seething with resentment the order went forth—presumably from the Russian Admiral at Suda Bay, who was in supreme command—that the tax was

to be collected by force! Ruling out the doubtful wisdom of the levy itself, here is the first of a series of stupid blunders, which in the end cost many hundreds of lives and the partial destruction of a city.

The next error, scarcely less culpable than the first, was committed by the British Colonel. One would not judge too harshly a soldier placed in a false position by an alien superior. Yet even so small a fragment of history as that of the '98 rising in Crete should be truthfully presented, and truth compels me to record the fact that the action of this officer throughout the crisis was incomprehensibly weak. For many days past the British garrison had received repeated warnings, and had been furnished with ample proofs of the dangerous temper of the populace. One instance will suffice. Every house and garden wall commanding the camp had been loopholed for attack. The loopholes, it is true, were masked, but the British officers were well aware of their existence. Warnings and proofs alike seem to have been completely ignored, and those responsible to have lived in a fool's paradise one must suppose to have been of the devil's making.

Under the circumstances one would have imagined that common prudence if not military training would have dictated the safeguarding of the camp and the sending of an adequate force to gather the hated tax. The entire garrison should have been under arms, a full company at least dispatched into the seething city. Neither of these precautions was taken. A picket under a subaltern was detailed for the extremely hazardous duty, and while they marched, many of them to their death, their unsuspecting comrades played football!

Nemesis awaited them at three different points. With increasing difficulty the picket had forced its way through the narrow, teeming alleys as far as the watergate, the exit through the walls on to the harbour quays. Here they found themselves completely hemmed in by the menacing, though so far passive, mob. Then the third

of the fatal blunders was made. One of the picket, whether by accident or design is not known, fired his rifle; probably he was attacked, and did so in self-defence. In either case it was the spark which exploded the magazine. Instantly the whole city was in an uproar; the picket, beset by a fanatical horde armed with guns and knives, fled through the watergate and scattered along the quays, where they were picked off like scuttling rabbits in the open. The first to fall was the subaltern, shot through the head.

Tied up to the harbour wall lay the small ship employed in condensing water for the camp. Her crew, quick to grasp what was happening, lowered ropes and ladders, up which many of the stampeded Highlanders were hauled to comparative safety. The remainder lay dotted about the quays, some dead, others wounded; but, in face of the fierce fire opened on the ship from every window and coign of vantage round the harbour, nothing could be done at the moment in the way of rescue. With extreme difficulty she cast off from the quay, and, still the target of a hundred rifles, worked her way out of the harbour to the open roadstead beyond.

Lying at anchor in that roadstead was a small British gunboat, the *Hazard*. She was the sole representative at Kandia of the allied navies, and she rose magnificently to the occasion. The first consideration was the succour of the wounded soldiers lying beneath a broiling sun upon the quay. A cutter and, I think, the whaler¹ were promptly lowered, and, taking with him, in addition to the boat's crew, the gunboat's surgeon and her detachment of Marines (a lance-sergeant and seven or eight privates), the Captain, Vaughan-Lewis, steered for the mouth of the harbour.

¹ I cannot recall whether there were two boats or one, or, if the former, whether they went ashore simultaneously. The point, however, is of no material importance.

CHAPTER XVII

The Cretan Rising of September, 1898.

THE INSTANT THE CROWDED BOAT entered the harbour she became the target for every sniper in the houses which surrounded it on its three landward sides. Several of the crew were hit while crossing it, but there was no wavering on that deadly errand of mercy. Those who were uninjured scrambled ashore, and, while the sailors went to the relief of the wounded, the tiny handful of Marines formed up and by their steady fire cleared the quay, if not the houses, of the Bashi-Bazouk gunmen. With a devotion and heroism which won him the V.C., Surgeon J. Maillard, R.N. (since dead), tended the wounded, and helped to remove them and the killed to the boat, the Marines—their coolness and discipline were beyond praise—continuing to cover the movements of their shipmates till they in their turn could embark. It was an added stanza to the immortal sea epic of the race. A British boat's crew had dashed into a death-ringed harbour and carried off their fallen comrades in the teeth of a fanatical populace in arms.

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant left in command of the *Hazard* had played his part in the little drama. Most, if not all, of the seamen and Marines being on shore, he manned the guns with the stokers and, on his own initiative—laying and firing the guns himself so that he should bear the sole responsibility—he started in to shell the city. It was a puny bombardment, yet it gave pause to the Bashis; it is even probable that, had it

not been for this timely show of force from the sea, very few, if any, of the landing party would have escaped with their lives. It was an especially courageous act, for the Lieutenant in question was one of those officers known in the Navy as the Hungry Hundred, who had been drawn from the merchant service during a recent war scare. They were generally looked at askance by the graduates from the *Britannia*, and, had one of them in assuming responsibility committed an error of judgment, his shrift would have been extremely short. The officer in question narrowly escaped court-martial; he should have been promoted. If he was, I never heard of it.

I have said that Nemesis awaited the negligent garrison at three different points. The fatal shot fired by the picket—it was about one in the afternoon—was the signal for a simultaneous attack on the camp and on the military hospital in the city. The Highland sentry posted at the entrance to the latter, seeing an armed mob approaching, gallantly closed the gates, and was shot dead in the act. For several hours the building was besieged by the Bashî-Bazouks, who by this time had been roused to fanatical frenzy. Fortunately—and to their credit be it recorded—the R.A.M.C. officers had shown more foresight than their combatant brethren. So far from burying their heads in the sand, they had collected rifles and ammunition, with which they now proceeded to arm the hospital staff and as many patients as were able to leave their beds. Hasty defences were improvised, and an S.O.S. in the form of a bloodstained sheet was hoisted on the roof, which was visible from the camp. And help (which never came) was badly needed, for the Bashîs were firing into the wards at close range from the neighbouring windows, and even women took their share in shooting at the sick. In the courtyard lay a wounded Cretan employed at the hospital. A doctor called for volunteers to bring him in. The man was saved, but two of the rescuers were

killed, and the doctor himself was shot in the ankle. The Medical Service at all events, both Naval and Military, came out of the ordeal with full marks.

The third of the simultaneous attacks was made on the camp itself. Here, too, the distant shot from the picket was the signal for concerted action; it would seem as though the watchers behind those masked loopholes had been waiting for it. Instantly a murderous fire was opened at close range on the unsuspecting football players, who scattered in all directions to the shelter of gun embrasures in the city walls, which partly bordered their parade. The uproar in the town told the startled Highlanders that their comrades of the picket had been attacked; they heard firing in the direction of the hospital, noted the bloodstained signal of distress flying from the roof, and, literally, saw red. At the risk of his life a sergeant gallantly crossed the open to the Officers' Mess hut, where most of his superiors were assembled. The men, he reported, were clamouring for an officer to lead them into the city to the relief of their beset comrades. It was deemed inexpedient to accede to their request.

As the afternoon wore on the situation grew desperate. From the houses of the city the ground sloped gently upwards to within a few feet of the top of the massive walls. Along the crest of the western wall, dominating the city in front and the plain in their rear, were stretched the huts and tents of the allies' camp, a narrow strip of open land (used for parade purposes) lying between them and the houses. On one side of this strip lay half the battalion of Highlanders—the other half was on outpost duty ten miles away—a dozen Royal Engineers under a subaltern, a detachment of Bersaglieri with two of their officers, and a mere handful of French Marines, Russian sailors, Turks and British military details. I doubt if at that time the garrison mustered 500 all told. On the other side of the open was a city densely packed with (for the most part

armed) fanatics, whose numbers have been variously estimated at between ten and thirty thousand. The latter were always potential belligerents, yet the officer commanding the camp does not appear to have deemed it necessary to take the simplest measures for its defence.

Then occurred the episode on which, ten years later, I based the *motif* of *The Flag-Lieutenant*. At grave personal risk Lieutenant Kennedy, commanding the small party of Sappers, went alone into the town to within hailing distance of the Eastern Telegraph Company's offices and ordered the operator, who appeared in response at one of the upper windows, to cable to Suda Bay for a battleship. The rumour that a man-of-war had been sent for, and the subsequent appearance of the *Camperdown*, in all human probability saved the garrison from being wiped out that same night.

As soon as there was light enough I was ordered to land with my detachment to reinforce the Highlanders, whom we could see through glasses crowded on the north-west angle of the walls. The sea was rapidly rising, for at this season of the year off Crete it gets up with the sun, running with considerable violence throughout the day, and subsiding again to a flat calm at nightfall. In the open roadstead the big battleship herself was beginning to pitch at her anchors; to jump from her ladder one by one at the psychological moment into the leaping boats below was a lengthy business for some sixty or seventy soldiers hampered with arms, ammunition, equipment, rations, and greatcoats. Happily no one fell overboard, and, towing a cutter which contained half the party, and a whaler for landing purposes, the steam-pinnace shoved off and wildly plunged on her way towards the coast.

To enter yesterday's death-trap—the enclosed harbour—was neither desirable nor necessary. The Bashi-Bazouks would have opened fire on the boats the instant we entered it, and we should certainly have shared

the fate of the unfortunate picket had we attempted to fight our way through the streets. The alternative was to land on the open beach as near the city walls as possible, and spying a patch reasonably clear of rocks, we headed for it. But by this time a furious sea was running; from the stern-sheets of the pinnace the towed cutter at one moment seemed to be burrowing under our keel, the next to be descending on us from the clouds. A boiling surf ringed the coast, and the coxswain of the pinnace very rightly refused to go near it. When, therefore, we had approached as close to the breakers as we dared, the whaler was hauled alongside, five Marines (as many as she could hold) were with extreme difficulty transferred to her, and she disappeared into the smother of foam. From the pinnace and cutter, which were rolling their gunwales under in the heavy sea, we presently saw the smaller boat poised for an instant on the crest of a great comber, and the next a heap of matchwood on the beach. She appeared to have turned a complete somersault, the five Marines and their impedimenta being flung in every direction.

It was all in the day's work of "Her Majesty's Jollies," and, scrambling to their feet, the quintet recovered their rifles, extended as a line of skirmishers, and cautiously climbed to the top of the sandhills. They were as concerned as we in the boats were to discover whether the hollows beyond held Bashi-Bazouks; but all apparently was quiet, and for the next few hours they lay perforce where they were, like bundles of sopping clothes spread out on the sand to dry.

We were now helpless, and signalled to the ship far out in the offing for assistance. But those on board were fully occupied in transferring the wounded from the condensing ship and the *Hazard* to the *Camperdown's* sick bay, an anxious business in so big a sea. They had scant leisure to concern themselves with the seasick

Marines, whose breakfasts were being rapidly rolled out of them by the violent tumbling of the stationary boats. Each of the latter was continually shipping water; there was a considerable danger of its putting out the pinnacle's fires, in which case she would have shared the fate of the whaler, with the addition probably of some loss of life. It was therefore with no little relief that, late in the forenoon, we espied a boat, now cocked against the skyline, now hidden in the trough of the sea, heading in our direction from the ship. She brought the First Lieutenant, who at once took charge of the situation by anchoring the cutter and veering her stern shorewards till we were as near the breakers as he deemed prudent.

"I've done all I can," he laughed, turning to me; "it's up to you to do the rest."

We all went overboard as we were, and trusted to luck. The breakers hurled us towards the beach, the strong undertow pulled us back again. Sometimes we were swimming, at others our feet touched the sand; my own impression is that for at least an hour I never came to the surface at all—though I suppose we were actually in the water no longer than ten or fifteen minutes at most. But, weighted as we were with our arms, ammunition, rations, and equipment, I doubt whether we should all have reached dry land, had not the five bundles drying on the sandhills come to life, formed themselves into a chain, and dragged the weaker of us from the maelstrom. Not a rifle was lost (they were useless of course for hours to come), and though my sword slipped out of the scabbard and still lies, presumably, deep in the Cretan sand, its loss was more than balanced by the humour of my subsequent correspondence on the subject with the Admiralty. I wonder who now possesses the tailor-made weapon with which their Lordships first proposed to replace my proved Wilkinson blade!

Fixing bayonets on our rifles which the sea had

temporarily put out of action (we were taking no chances), we threaded our way among the sandhills to a sallyport through which the watching Highlanders admitted us into the city. Their attitude was that of "pleased to meet you," as Tooting would say, and in ten minutes our sea-sodden clothes were hanging like banners from the outward walls, and a detachment of Royal Marines were parading in the borrowed tartan of a Highland regiment. The Colonel commanding the latter remained on board the *Camperdown*, "weather-bound," as he subsequently reported; the second in command was on leave shooting ibex in the mountains. With the concurrence of the junior Major in temporary charge, I traced some hasty entrenchments, and spent the remainder of the day with the detachment in digging our own section of the line at all events into some semblance of military defence. By this time H.M.S. *Astraea* had arrived in the roads and landed her Marines, bringing my command up to 100; and that night the British Joeys lay (when they came off outpost duty) behind a line of obstacles, hurriedly improvised it is true, yet more reassuring than the nakedness elsewhere which seemed to beckon the enemy's attack.

When at dusk the British garrison paraded under arms, the question arose as to which unit should furnish the night patrols. It was agreed that the loopholed houses and garden walls across the open must be kept under close observation lest the Bashis should secretly mass behind them for a sudden rush. His own men, the Highland Major explained to me, had been under arms the whole of the previous night; they were rattled by the events of the preceding day; they were done to a turn—in a word, would the Marines undertake the duty? The Marines, I reminded him, had also been up all night preparing to land; they had had an early morning bathe which had rattled some of them too; while Scotland slumbered they had spent a blazing hot day with picks and shovels on a parade as hard as

iron; but, being Marines, they could do a night's outpost job on the top of it standing on their heads. As a compromise it was arranged that the Marines should be reinforced by the Highland Band and Pipers, who had temporarily discarded their instruments for the rifle, and by fifty Turks, who—why I cannot say, but to our no little embarrassment—seemed to be at loose ends in our camp.

The night was filled with sinister suggestion. The teeming city, in the streets of which lay the bodies of 600 Christians massacred that afternoon, was hushed in a guilty silence. Above it hung a pall of smoke through which the blur of a misshapen moon loomed redly, and which every now and then reflected a flicker of flame from the smouldering ruins below. Backwards and forwards till dawn, with the regularity of a pendulum, swept the fanlike beam of the *Camperdown's* searchlight, revealing here a British sentry, there my cosmopolitan patrol prowling among the garden walls, but nowhere so much as the flutter of a Bashi-Bazouk's rags. Why did not those armed thousands, stealthily watching through shuttered windows and loopholes, rush the shaken handful of their enemies on the city wall? Without employing a single knife or gun, by sheer weight of numbers alone, they could have hurled us over the brink on to the plain or the rocks below. Why they stayed their bloodstained hands I shall suggest in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII

Kennedy. The Bersaglieri. My friend Cico. The Hangings on the Wall.

SOME WEEKS BEFORE the outbreak at Kandia, in full view of the glasses of the allied squadron at Suda Bay, a body of insurgents had been seen attacking a Christian village high on the mountain side. The Russian Admiral had ordered the *Camperdown* to shell them. With the other Great Powers for a gallery, England was on her mettle—one is tempted to say, gun-metal. Four shells in all were fired, and all four fell within an area that might have been covered by a tablecloth, and so uncomfortably near the assailants that the Christian villagers slept in security for months afterwards. The story of the *Camperdown's* miraculous power to deal retribution from such a distance preceded her to Kandia, and our immunity from attack was entirely due to the superstitious terror inspired by her gunnery. It was said that mothers frightened their fractious children into silence by threats to call the *Camperdown*, and indeed one can understand any infant being overawed by that mouthful of sounding syllables. One can understand no less perhaps the self-effacement of the infant's father, for it was common belief that the battleship's ray was searching interiors and, for future identification, taking flashlight portraits of the murderers. So great was their guilty terror that, during the whole of the five or six days and nights that we lay out in the open with our eyes glued to the houses before us, we never caught a glimpse of a living soul, save the *muezzin* calling the faithful to prayer from the top

of a minaret. But for that suggestion of lurking humanity Kandia might have been a city of the dead.

When day broke and the garrison in accordance with military tradition stood to their arms, I withdrew my little force across the open and rejoined our comrades on the walls. The long night had been a "jumpy" one. The eerie silence, the near neighbourhood of those 600 men, women, and children stiff in pools of blood beneath the moon, the sudden orange flare as the breeze fanned the smouldering ruins, the knowledge that we were watched by thousands of hidden eyes—all combined to send our hearts into our mouths and our fingers to the trigger at every moving shadow. Nor were our nerves soothed by the presence in our midst of that half company of Turkish Moslems, so obviously waiting to see which way the cat was going to jump. For, should it be their way, we knew that they would instantly turn their rifles against us, and we patrolled with one eye on the shadows and the other on our tatterdemalion but excellently armed comrades in the fezes at our elbow.

Those primrose dawns at Kandia, while we stood in silence under arms, are painted very surely on my memory. The outline of the flat-roofed houses drawn with sharp rectilineal strokes upon the sky; the slender fingers of white minarets reaching upwards to catch the coming gold; the wisp of soft grey smoke, suggesting in the clear atmosphere a scarf torn by the wind from a woman's shoulders to drift across the housetops; the ravens wheeling high overhead above the unburied horrors of the streets; and in the background, dominating the entire scene, the loom of the Sleeping Turk Mountain, so called from its curious resemblance to a gigantic figure on its back, the profile of the face turned with an inscrutable smile towards the zenith. It was not long before every man of the worn-out detachment, screened from snipers by one of the huts, was sleeping as soundly as the giant on the skyline.

I woke at noon to find Kennedy seated on a biscuit-box hard by, patiently awaiting my return to consciousness. It appeared that the *Camperdown* was to land her field guns that evening as soon as the sea had gone down, and that the sappers had been digging out all night on a redoubt for their emplacement. Even so the work was scarcely half done; it was obvious that twelve exhausted men would never finish it by night-fall, by which time it was imperative that the camp should have the protection of the guns. Kennedy was worried.

"Ask the Highlanders for a working party," I suggested.

"I'll be damned if I do!" he retorted viciously. "They've been watching us all day without lifting a finger to help; if they haven't the decency to volunteer, I'll not be beholden to 'em."

"They've been a bit rattled," I pleaded; "however, I'll see whether my merry men——"

"I shouldn't dream of it," he interrupted; "the Marines have done more than their share already. I hate to ask foreigners, but I was wondering whether the Bersaglieri—you speak the lingo, don't you?"

"Enough for the purpose," I laughed, getting up; "but, as I don't know the Italian for 'ca' canny,' I'll leave Jock out of the story."

We found the two Bersaglieri officers asleep in their tent, it being the hour of the *siesta* and very hot. I apologised for disturbing them, explained the urgency of the situation, and asked for a few volunteers. They were courtesy itself. While the subaltern slipped out to rouse his sleeping men, the captain hospitably entertained us with cigarettes and cognac. In five minutes the former returned, saluted, and reported the volunteer working party ready.

I counted on half a dozen at most. But on leaving the tent we were confronted by a long line of Bersaglieri in their trim fatigue dress and scarlet caps, all smiling,

and all very wide awake. The detachment had volunteered to a man! The redoubt was finished in ample time to receive the guns, which were landed after sunset and placed in position by the Marines. I record the incident as a tribute to our gallant Italian allies, for whose soldierly qualities I have the highest admiration.

A quarter of a century was to pass before Kennedy and I met again, and then it was for a few brief hours only, and for the last time. One winter's afternoon in 1924 he turned up (now a Colonel) quite unexpectedly at my cottage in St. Germans, having landed that morning at Plymouth. He had been deported from Egypt, in which country he had spent the greater part of the interim, and in the service of which he had risen to eminence as a consulting engineer. He had refused, it seemed, to countenance a certain war scheme in connection with irrigation, the materialisation of which would, in his judgment, be an outrage on civilisation and a crime against humanity.

Incidentally it was a question which involved vast sums of money. I am not qualified to express an opinion either on the scheme itself or on his judgment, and in any case I have only heard his version of the story. He may, for all I know, have been suffering from delusions, though his words carried conviction, and much of what he told me has since been corroborated from other sources. But his tale of hidden forces, which control governments, and in conflict with which he himself had been finally swept across Europe, was so sinister that one involuntarily recalled the methods of the Borgias. He had recently been in hospital six months, he declared, as the result of drinking ground glass in his coffee, and on two other occasions his life had been attempted. He certainly looked ill, and, I regret to say, died in Paris some months later. On the whole I am inclined to think that he had been up against a bigger proposition than any one man could tackle, and had gone down before it as inevitably as

though he had stood in the way of a tramcar. But I shall always think of him as the subaltern whose act of gallantry at Kandia in all probability saved the allies' camp from being annihilated.

Meanwhile in Crete the cable had been sending out S.O.S. messages : ships and troops from Malta, Egypt, and elsewhere were hurried in response to Kandia, and the beleaguered camp began to breathe more freely. The successive arrivals of such fine fighting regiments as the Welsh Fusiliers, the Northumberland Fusiliers, and the Connaught Rangers relieved us of all further anxiety ; the French, Italians, and Russians also reinforced their respective contingents, and a formidable squadron began to assemble round the *Camperdown* and *Astraea* in the roadstead. A stranger ignorant of recent events might well have wondered at this show of force against the ancient city, for of human life within its walls not a sign was visible.

It was the arrival of the British flagship early on the fifth or sixth morning after the outbreak which brought the teeming thousands from their cellars and galvanised the city back to life again. At eight o'clock the Admiral received the customary salute of guns ; before the second flash every housetop in the city was packed with conscience-stricken humanity. One rubbed one's eyes at the instant change from the week's silence and invisibility to the jack-in-the-box exhibition before us, not the least interesting detail of which was the glint of sunlight on many thousand gun-barrels and knives. The Bashi-Bazouks believed that the bombardment of the city had begun.

In the course of the forenoon the Admiral, Sir Gerrard Noel, landed with a handful of officers, and, scornful of the rabble, walked through the streets without the armed escort another man would have deemed prudent. It was a plucky act ; but the back of the insurrection was broken, and the same evening the Marines, being no longer needed, were withdrawn to their ships. Before

we embarked in the boats the Colonel commanding came down to the beach and informed us that he should send a special report of our services to the War Office. I never heard of its reaching its destination: probably more important matters drove the promise from the gallant Colonel's mind. But, whatever else they forgot, the canny Highlanders remembered to send me a mess bill for the bully beef and biscuit I consumed during the time I fortified and night-patrolled their camp for them!

On reporting our arrival on board, Captain Hughes-Hallett made a similar promise with regard to the Admiralty. But, reaching England a year later, I found that the Adjutant-General of the Corps had never even heard that the Marines had been landed. He rapped me over the knuckles for omitting to send in a report of my own, though I pleaded that a modesty which had handicapped me throughout my career had restrained me from self-advertisement when my naval and military superiors had pledged themselves, in effect, to give the Marines "a good Press." In the end I succeeded in getting my three senior N.C.O.'s specially promoted, but my story, "What Hassan saw from the Minaret," dished *me* for twenty years before my own services were recognised. Hassan, it would appear, saw too much for the happiness of Highland Colonels, post-Captains, and red-button Mandarins at Whitehall. In fairness to the Admiralty I should add that they wished to give me a brevet from the word "go," and did, in another generation, obtain for me a military C.B.E.

A comb, metaphorically speaking, was run by the Powers through the bloodstained populace of Kandia, and several hundred of the more directly implicated assassins were immured, pending trial, on board the several ships of the squadron. Under the forecastle of the *Camperdown* I had charge of a cageful of as picturesque and villainous jailbirds as Eastern Europe could produce. We converted the flat into a secure yet

airy prison by the simple expedient of tricing torpedo nets between the beams overhead and the deck. The steel meshes possessed the double advantage of a strong barrier through which the sentry had an uninterrupted view of the prisoners, many of whom were afterwards most deservedly hanged.

In due course an international court-martial assembled at Kandia for the trial of the ringleaders, and three of its members—a captain and subaltern of the French Marines and a certain Captain Cico, an Italian infantry officer—were berthed in the *Camperdown*. As the latter could not speak a word of English, the Admiral detailed me, in default of a qualified interpreter, to act as the Italian soldier's "sea daddy."

Cico was the most delightfully cheery, amusing, and irresponsible Italian I have ever met, which is saying a good deal, for I know his nation well. As with most of his countrymen, the word that loomed largest in his vocabulary was *domani*; and I could never get him to make any effort at the moment for which he could devise a pretext for postponing till the morrow. Fortunately my responsibility did not include attendance at the court-martial; apparently Cico's did not either. For as often as not, while the court was sitting ashore, its Italian member (I believe he only had a sort of watching brief) was stretched on his back on a ward-room settee laughing over the *Comic Cuts* of his native Press. He hated his two French fellow-members and shipmates—who took their duties very seriously—with true Italian fervour, and my British diplomacy was often hard put to it to prevent an open rupture between France and Italy. In their presence he was depressed and moody. But when, half an hour after dinner, the two Frenchmen rose, clicked their heels and, bidding us good-night, retired to their cabins to discuss the day's proceedings, Cico's gloomy face became wreathed in smiles. Seizing a newspaper, he would roll it into a tube, present it at the Frenchmen's backs as though

it were a gun, and whisper, "Bang! I shoot Napoleon," after which he would entertain us with impersonations and card-tricks till the small hours of the morning.

English naval officers are—at any rate were—notoriously poor linguists, and the rapidity with which Cico picked up our tongue put the Mess to shame. I, of course, sat next to him at dinner, and translated the ultra-British menu for his benefit. On one occasion I announced that we were about to have rice-pudding. Cico turned pale with horror.

"Rice?" he shouted, pushing his plate to the middle of the table, "for me—NO!"

"What's wrong with it?" I asked.

He glared at me indignantly. "Mouse, plural mice," he explained, "rat, plural rice. I no eat it—*Santa Maria!* I die first!"

Some months afterwards I met my friend Cico in Kanea, whither he had been transferred in the course of duty. He was accompanied by two ladies, his wife and sister-in-law, to whom he introduced me. We chatted for some moments in Italian.

"But your husband speaks excellent English," I presently assured the *signora*, "and I am rather proud of my pupil. Say something in English, Cico."

For some moments he cudgelled his memory, his forehead knit in the effort. Then, with a broad grin, he pressed his thumb against the neighbouring wall, gave a realistic imitation of the whirr of an electric bell, and shouted, "Waiter! Five whiskeysoda, seven gintonic!"

"He often says that in his sleep," commented his wife curiously. "What does it mean, *signore*?"

"A libel on a British wardroom," I laughed; but I refrained from encouraging the linguist further.

Very early in the morning of the day on which the *Camperdown* sailed from Kandia I witnessed from her quarterdeck the last scene in the tragedy in which I had played my tiny part. Upon the wall on which we

had lived a strenuous week now rose against the clear sky of dawn a great structure of beams and planks surmounted by a box-like hut. Within the armoured walls of the latter, invisible to the spectators, stood an executioner with axe and block complete. Like a mediæval headsman this brawny Victorian Highlander leaned upon the instrument of vengeance, grimly awaiting the signal to launch a dozen bloodstained miscreants into eternity. And there the mediæval parallel ended, for no victim's neck was to be laid on the block, no blood would stain the axe. Despite the Tower Hill suggestion, justice was to be administered in strict accordance with modern ideas. Over the block was stretched a rope, the key-rope of a tangle which upheld the fatal platform ; and on the platform, bound, a noose round each neck, stood the first batch of murderers accountable in all for some 700 lives. In England a public execution is unthinkable ; as an example to the fanatical hordes of the East it is often imperative for the common safety. The gallows was of design set up on the highest point of the city where none could fail to see it. Grimly impressive to spectators standing aloof on ships' decks, the scene must have daunted guilty onlookers within the city walls. The row of doomed sinners silhouetted against the sky, the wailing of the Moslem women, the poignant notes of the "Last Post," all in sharp contrast with the brilliance of the morning—I see and hear them again as though it were yesterday.

Hark ! The clarion call of a bugle, clear and resonant on the morning air. So pregnant with doom are its two ascending notes that even the wailing of the women is momentarily hushed in an awestricken silence. "Lights out !" Save perhaps the stroke of the avenging axe, it is the last sound heard by the ragged *morituri* ere they drop into the Unknown.

So fell the curtain on the Cretan drama of September '98.

CHAPTER XIX

Ghosts at Greenwich. In the Matter of a Spy.

A YEAR LATER, September 1899, the *Camperdown* returned home and paid off at Portsmouth. Although I have been to sea many times since, the paying off of the *Camperdown* marked the close of my Service career afloat, and I still look back on it with regret. It was the ship's first appearance in England since the *Victoria* disaster six years earlier, and her arrival roused considerable interest. Crowds of trippers used to visit her daily as we lay in dry dock, in the morbid hope, I presume, of seeing chips of the ill-fated flagship still sticking to her bows.

Impelled by my old distaste for garrison routine, I was no sooner ashore than I applied for, and was granted, permission to attend a course of instruction at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. Provided he took up at least two military subjects, a Marine had the choice of a bewildering assortment of others. It is said that a complete course of cigarette cards obviates the need of going to Oxford—except, of course, for trousers; but the range of subjects covered by the erudite tobacconists is bagatelle to that of the Naval University. I saved myself considerable trouble in the matter of selection by writing the names of the multifarious subjects on screws of paper, mixing them in a hat, and getting a friend to draw half a dozen. The result promised me at least a term of pleasing variety, for the subjects which turned up were astronomy, water-colour drawing, naval history, military law, French, and chemistry.

One should not, I admit, embark upon a course of study at the nation's expense as though it were a variety entertainment, but the humour incidental to the two last-named subjects was thrust upon me, and I enjoyed what Heaven sent. The French class was composed (apart from myself) entirely of post-Captains, and to hear those august personages chided for errors in their *dictée* like first-form schoolboys afforded me scarcely less enjoyment than their vocal gymnastics with the Gallic tongue. That a young Major of Marines (with a pen already suspect) should be present in their hour of weakness caused much grinding of teeth : it was as though an impious trespasser on Olympus had spied upon the nakedness of the gods ; and before a god ventured on so much as a "*Wee, mossoo*," the mortal was glared into a proper sense of his position.

Neither I nor anyone else with an appreciation of his genius missed without good cause one of the late Professor Lewis's chemistry lectures. I never made the least pretence of following the maze of formulæ and figures with which, with lightning rapidity, he covered the blackboard, nor did the chemistry of anti-fouling compositions for ships' bottoms leave me anything but cold. But the seeming magic of his demonstrations, no less than the wit and logic of his reasoning, filled the benches of his classroom with applauding naval officers deaf to his smiling protest, "Gentlemen, this is not a conjuring performance." I recall with a smile his contention that the reason so many anti-fouling compositions had been failures was that their inventors were ignorant of the anatomy of the barnacle. So far from clinging to the ship's side, the parasite, he declared, sat upon it. "Why, gentlemen," he concluded, a twinkle in his eye, "you might as well try to poison a man by putting arsenic on his chair !"

But it was less as a temple of Minerva than as a fane of History that Greenwich Hospital appealed to me,

and I never wearied of wandering through the colonnades and courts of the old grey pile. Among the pictures of the Painted Hall and the Tudor and Stuart ships of the Model Room I spent many a leisure hour, but I think that it was in my own quarters that I most often "sensed" the historic atmosphere of the place. There, of a night, with the river mist drifting past the seventeenth-century windows and a red fire dying in the hob grate, I felt that at any moment the ghost of some battered old sea-dog in a three-cornered hat might stump across the rooms. Alas! he never came, though Greenwich Hospital has not always been barren of "strange occurrences": the Ringing Bells is a case in point. Somewhere in the 'eighteen-seventies—I am not sure of the exact date—the old spring bells of the period rang continuously for several days and nights throughout the building. Every effort was made to trace the cause, but without success. Even the Psychical Research Society deemed the phenomenon worth investigation, and Sir William Barrett, the eminent scientist, has recorded it in one of his books.

To the ignominy of my topography fiasco at the Chatham School of Military Engineering some years before I fear I should have added that of failure in chemistry, had not a kindly Destiny removed me from Greenwich on the eve of examination. I was appointed a Member of the Naval Intelligence Department of the Admiralty, and thither early in 1900 I "proceeded."

The chief qualifications for the post were an intelligence distinguishable from a rabbit's, a reasonably untarnished Service record, and a working knowledge of, at least, two foreign tongues. With the chastening conviction that a treacherous memory, a loose-reined imagination, and a tendency to see humour in highly placed officials must now be strictly disciplined, I entered on my new duties, which I soon found absorbing, if arduous and exacting. We worked six or seven hours a day, including Saturdays and not infrequently

Sundays, and the work was of an extremely responsible nature. Secret information from a hundred sources all over the globe poured into the Department day and night, and the strictest reticence combined with an undeviating method were imperative in dealing with it. In no other organisation in the world is the axiom "a place for everything and everything in its place" more vital or more rigidly enforced than in the Secret Service. A document misplaced in that vast honeycomb of cells in the Admiralty building meant a feverish search of many hours, perhaps days; if it were needed meanwhile in some sudden emergency, as was sure to be the case, the strain was nerve-shattering.

In all the naval and military (and indeed many of the political) movements of the world, projected or accomplished, we were behind the scenes and knew what was going to happen sometimes long before the Press. As often as not the general public would never hear the truth at all; for although, when called upon, the Intelligence Department would supply Parliament with the plain, unvarnished facts and figures, the politicians invariably cooked them to suit the palate of an electorate that will only believe what it wishes to believe.

More than once I myself have supplied from information in my possession the straight answer to some question asked in the House. And on the morrow I have rubbed my eyes at reading in *The Times* the grossly misleading version of that answer told to the nation by the Minister concerned. Nothing has given me a greater distrust of the professional politician—there are exceptions of course—than my experience of his methods gained in the Intelligence Department.

More than a quarter of a century has elapsed since I was one of its members; a world-shattering war has completely changed the international situation, and the methods of the Secret Service have largely changed with it. Yet, in recalling one's experiences at White-

hall, even as long ago as Queen Victoria's reign, one must move with discretion, picking one's way past a score of tempting secrets like a cat in a china pantry. But the following episode is at this date of no greater significance than a Jacobite intrigue of the '15 or '45; and, seeing that it violates no official confidence, and that, even so near the Great War, interest still attaches to a spy incident, I venture to record it here.

After our recent comradeship in the great agony of Armageddon it is difficult to realise that England and France have not always been the firm friends and allies they so happily are to-day. But it will be remembered that in the early days of the century the two Powers were eyeing each other like a couple of dogs with their hackles up; the Fashoda bone of contention was not yet buried, our common foe across the North Sea had not yet forced us to drop it and face him in self-defence. The French Intelligence Department was watching us closely, and ours was no less concerned in spying on France.

Now, we knew in a general way that the armament of a certain fort on the French coast had been recently changed, but we lacked the essential details. There was, however, a traitor in France who was perfectly willing, at a price, to supply them, and we were in touch with him. But it was obvious that the information could not be committed to writing, and the man himself, according to his own story, was too highly placed in the official world to cross the Channel without arousing curiosity. We would get word that he was coming, and on the heels of it a warning that he was watched and dared not move. My methods of correspondence with him—for, under the Director of Intelligence, the affair was mine—were interesting, though I certainly should not be justified in divulging them.

For six months it was a case of "nothing doing." Then one morning, as though he had dropped from the

clouds on to our doorstep, so to speak, he was at the Charing Cross Hotel.

The Admiral sent for me, and, in the manner of a mediæval baron, handed his varlet a bag of gold. "You know what our knowledge of the matter is," he began, "and what we require. If, in your judgment, the information he has to sell is worth it, pay him; if not, bring the money back. It is entirely a matter for your discretion."

After committing to memory (on the *littera scripta manet* principle) various recorded, though unverified, rumours of the new armament, I repaired to the hotel, and, under the assumed name known to him, was shown up to monsieur's bedroom. He was a pleasant, quietly assured, well-groomed man of middle age, spoke English perfectly, and betrayed the *pukka sahib* at the first glance. He was inconspicuously dressed, and I of course was in plain clothes.

"Where shall we talk?" he asked, after a conventional word or two.

"In the open," I suggested. I had no mind to be knocked on the head either there or in a Soho private sitting-room with the loss of a hatful of Secret Service money and nothing to show for it.

"Certainly," he assented. "How about St. James's Park?"

We agreed to leave the hotel separately, to take different routes, and to meet as old friends on the bridge over the ornamental water in the Park. The programme was carried out. No long-parted brothers could have forgathered unexpectedly with a greater show of astonishment and delight, nor have walked more affectionately arm-in-arm to the nearest vacant bench. And in the course of those few yards I learned all that I wished to know.

Beneath the light overcoat which he tossed carelessly over the seat between us I slipped the small canvas bag containing the price of a country's betrayal.

"You may take it for granted that the sum is as arranged," I said; "but I may as well have a receipt."

He looked a shade surprised: he was evidently an older dog at the game than I. But he courteously scribbled an acknowledgment on the back of an old envelope, as though he were giving me an address.

Long-parted brothers do not commonly separate by different paths within five minutes of their happy encounter. Brief as the interval had been, our business was done, yet, lest prying eyes were on us, the farce must be played out. For half an hour longer we sat smoking and talking, he doing all the talking, for rarely have I met a man who so effectually compelled one's silence. His theme was modern French history, a subject he had at his finger-tips, and on which he discoursed with the erudition of a scholar and the dramatic instinct of the artist. I recall his carefully reasoned deduction that, had the Duke of Orleans (at that time notorious in London) played his cards well, he would have been by then on the throne of France. Whether his reasoning was sound I do not pretend to judge; that he was an exceptionally well-read and cultured man jumped to the car. What was not so obvious was why such a man should turn Iscariot for something less than £100. I have since come to the conclusion that the secret he sold to us—which turned out to be accurate enough—was more than compensated for by the information he carried back to France. In other words, that he was a spy on both sides.

On rising to go he held out his hand. I was tempted to take it, but the recollection that it was the hand of a traitor restrained me; I could not do it, and merely bowed. Yet he was an attractive rascal, and I have often wondered what happened to him.

I returned to the Admiralty, reported the result of the interview to the Director of Naval Intelligence, and, not a little proud of my sudden flair for business,

handed him the receipt. He instantly threw it in the fire.

"Never do that again," he admonished. "No writing must pass hands in the matter of Secret Service money. No record even is kept of its expenditure, which is left entirely to the discretion of the officers concerned. It couldn't be otherwise."

"This was a large sum," I ventured, "to be responsible for without——"

"If you were not considered a proper officer to take that responsibility," interrupted the Admiral curtly, "you would not be here."

"So that's that," thought I, as I returned to my charts and folios.

CHAPTER XX

Of a "Tantalus," a Studio, and the West Indies.

ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES at the Intelligence Department was Commander Sturdee, afterwards Admiral Sir Doveton Sturdee of Falkland Islands fame, whose lamented death occurred last year. I recall him as one of the quiet, rather than of the "breezy" type of naval officer, whose kindly disposition prompted him to find time after his day's work to look me up in a distant part of London and sit with me when I was ill. The last time we forgathered was in the Officers' Mess of the R.M. Barracks at Plymouth, some five or six years later, when, more in sorrow than in anger, he deplored my authorship of *The Shadow on the Quarterdeck*, then just published. He held that the book presented an unfair picture of the naval executive officer of the period in relation to the Marine—that I, in fact, had retaliated on the former for Marryat's treatment of my own Corps. It was the view held by the Navy and the Service Press generally, and I admit there may have been a *soupçon* of truth in it—but a *soupçon* only. The perspective of time has not appreciably altered my outlook on the Victorian Navy; and, though a distinguished Admiral did marvel in his club that their Lordships had not court-martialled me, and a gallant Commander did hurl the obnoxious book through the wardroom scuttle, a very large number of officers of other departments—to say nothing of the Marines—have borne testimony to the truth of the picture.

Throughout my life I have been handicapped by a

difficulty in restraining my mirth on solemn occasions, such as official speech-making, when laughter, unless specially courted, is taboo. It was therefore as well, perhaps, that I was not present at a dinner given to Sir Doveton Sturdee after the War by the officers of my Corps at Chatham. For, in his post-prandial speech, the Commandant, a well-meaning if somewhat ponderous soldier, unconsciously referred to their distinguished guest as "Sir Stoveton Durdee." The subalterns, a graceless breed at the best of times, were convulsed with stifled merriment, though one cannot think that the gallant Admiral himself could have appreciated the spoonerism. Incidentally it is pleasant to know that in the present Commander Sturdee, whom I have also met, the avenger of Admiral Sir Christopher Craddock (a Lieutenant with me in China) has a son to continue his father's distinguished name in the sea Service.

Within six months of joining the Intelligence Department my brother officers, Naval and Marine, presented me with a spirit "tantalus." You will naturally jump to the conclusion that it was a tribute to my personal intelligence, though the married subscribers may have thought I was showing a pathetic lack of it. The tantalus was a wedding present.

For the first time since my initial meeting with the girl I was destined to marry I could now contemplate matrimony outside the walls of a workhouse. For some years past she had been on the professional stage, and at the moment was touring in the provinces. We had perforce waited a dozen years: there did not seem to be any valid reason for adding to the tale even as many hours. The sea Service is traditionally prompt in such matters, and who was I to break the tradition? I wrote to her, demanding a reply by wire. The answer was in the affirmative.

Three months later we were married at Sparkwell, of which Devon parish, as I have mentioned, her father

was vicar, and, after a brief honeymoon in West Cornwall, we returned to London, and I rejoined the Admiralty—as a Benedick. It is a rôle I have never for one moment of a quarter of a century regretted having undertaken; what I do regret is that circumstances neither of us could control deprived me of an additional twelve years of ideal comradeship.

While in the *Camperdown*, my first volume of sea stories—*Bearers of the Burden*—had been published by Lawrence and Bullen, a long since defunct firm, and I was beginning to be peeped at through blinds in literary Bohemia as though I were a strayed sea-dog barking in the street. The first kind folk to whistle me in to a bone, so to speak, were A. S. Boyd, best known perhaps as a *Punch* artist, and—as a charming writer of fiction and travel—his scarcely less talented wife. Shortly after my return to England I had received a courteous invitation from them to meet a few literary friends at their house in St. John's Wood, where in due course I turned up. I chanced to be a little late, and, to amuse themselves while waiting, each of the coterie set himself to do an imaginary portrait of the expected Major of Marines, whom none of them had ever seen. When I mention that in addition to the *Punch* illustrator himself the party included such humorists as W. Pett Ridge and W. W. Jacobs, it will be readily understood that a peep at those still treasured sketches sustains me even in the blackest hour of battle with the Income Tax Commissioners.

It was the first of many delightful forgatherings at the studio in St. John's Wood, and I recall with pleasure, albeit a little tintured with sadness, my first introduction to London literary and artistic life. After our marriage my wife was also welcomed to the coterie, the traditions in which she had been brought up enabling her to "catch on" at once. Alas those merry meetings can never be resumed! The youngest member of the circle was a buoyant lad in his mid

'teens, Stuart Boyd, on whose shoulders the father's mantle even then seemed to be descending. He was, I think, a student at the Slade, and his work was brimful of promise. But in spirit he was a soldier; as the only Regular he had met, I possessed for him an attraction that was embarrassing. In the middle of some literary discussion he would hurl a military conundrum at me and wait with bowed back for the answer. Poor Stuart! It was written that he should see more real soldiering in a few brief weeks than I had witnessed in twenty years. He was of that gallant host of only sons who fell in the Great War, and the memory of a very charming lad is all that remains. The little band of congenial spirits who gathered round the studio fire a quarter of a century ago are scattered—some I know not where. Two of us have settled in remote Cornwall; two others—the bereaved parents—in infinitely more remote New Zealand; one lies in his soldier's grave far from the happy, busy home of his eager boyhood.

At this time I was not only working all day on a job which demanded the utmost concentration of mind, but was also writing fiction far into the small hours of the morning. In other words I was playing the fool's game known as "burning the candle at both ends," with the inevitable result that before long the candle burnt the fool. I had a serious breakdown, aggravated probably by my recent bout of Malta fever and still more recent "flu," and was granted twelve months' sick leave on full pay in which to recover. But my soldiering was ended. Two years later, without having returned to duty, I was invalided out of the Service, and have been a physically poor thing ever since.

My wife and I had now settled down at Looe in Cornwall, where I had embarked on the extremely serious business of writing (what at least purported to be) humour. The list of my published books for that period is *The Passing of the Flagship*, 1902; *The Shadow*

on the *Quarterdeck*, 1903; *The Peradventures of Private Pagett*, 1904; *The Tadpole of an Archangel*, 1904; and *Men at Arms*, 1906. I derived considerable pleasure, and not a little pain, from writing them; whether they added appreciably to the gaiety of nations is another matter. Our home was an old farmhouse at the top of a little wooded combe which cork-screwed its way through the cliffs to a beach remote from the village. It was all so obviously contrived for smugglers that we re-christened the cottage "The Keg," and there for five years we led a happily busy, if uneventful, existence.

Yet, presently I began to grow restless! The sea, whispering along the sands or thundering on the rocks at the bottom of the combe, called me: Father Neptune was knocking at the door, and as one of his baptised sons it seemed undutiful not to obey. Perhaps it was no more than the schoolboy instinct to play the truant from his books, and, in any case, after the production of five volumes I needed a holiday. Having easily persuaded myself of the necessity, the only question that remained was where to go. All my sea experience hitherto had been in the northern, eastern, and southern hemispheres: there remained the western, for I had never yet crossed the Atlantic. My wife, who fully shares my feeling for the romance and glamour of the sea, had not been outside the United Kingdom: north, south, east, west were all one to her. We chose the West Indies.

One August day, then, we sailed from Avonmouth in the Elder Dempster mailboat *Port Antonio*, which ran direct between Bristol and Port Kingston, Jamaica. The voyage was uneventful, but we both filled it with the spirit of adventure. Drake and Hawkins, Mings, Rodney, and a whole kennelful of English sea-dogs had sailed the same course; in the moonlight, with the ship hushed in sleep, one might even glimpse a phantom galleon or first-rate, a cloud of fairy canvas on the phosphorescent sea. For Glamis Castle has no greater

cause to be haunted by ghostly Highlanders than the Caribbean has in the matter of buccaneer ships. Alas ! not even our joint desire could conjure spirits from the vasty deep, and we had to rest content with such commonplace magic of tropic latitudes as flying-fish and tumbling dolphins, the pageantry of dawns and sunsets, the phantasy of golden cumulus piled like oranges upon the rim of the blue plate of sea.

In the island of Jamaica lies a wealth of legend and romance, of history and ghost tales, all bound within a cover of enchanting beauty. From the Pallisades, in whose sand lie the bones of a thousand British seamen, to the peaks of the Blue Mountains thrust above the emerald forest, the eye wanders with increasing delight, while Port Royal Dockyard and Kingston Church—the latter with its Chippendale chairs and such memorials as that to So-and-so and his wife, “Barbarously Murdered by their Negro Slaves”—paint upon the mental retina a scarcely less vivid picture of the past.

Comedy, too—the laughing jade is rarely far away—was lying in wait for me among the Jamaica bananas, and, though it is jumping from the sublime to the ridiculous, I cannot resist the temptation of recording the following incident.

In a lonely inn at Spanish Town I chanced upon an English official (the Auditor-General, I think), its solitary guest, reading a book by the light of a smoky lamp. He was doubled up with laughter, and, after a little preliminary conversation, he recommended me to buy a copy of the volume in his hand as the best cure he knew of for a fit of the blues. I thanked him for his counsel. The book—though I did not mention it—was one of my own.

The following episode of the voyage is but one added instance to the legion which illustrate the tragedy of white mating with black—the tragedy which calls checkmate to so many promising careers, and is so far reaching in its disastrous results.

There had travelled with us in the same compartment of the train from Cornwall a girl of sixteen or so, who had an obvious air of breeding, was as obviously of mixed race, and most obviously of all was an exceedingly beautiful brunette of the delicate, exotic type of beauty. Trouble with a blustering ticket-collector gave us an opportunity of befriending her, and, with a shyly expressed gratitude on her side, we parted company in due course on the platform at Bristol.

One of the first faces we noted on the deck of the *Port Antonio* the following morning was that of our pretty fellow-passenger from Cornwall. She was lonely and not a little bewildered by the bustle around her, and she greeted us with genuine relief and pleasure. During the voyage my wife had many opportunities of "mothering" her, little kindnesses which won the girl's heart and confidence. It appeared that she was the daughter of a French planter in Jamaica, which she had left at the age of five; that for the past eleven years she had been brought up and educated in a clergyman's family in West Cornwall; and that she was now returning to her parents for the first time since she had left the island as a baby. She barely remembered them, but she was looking forward with eagerness to the meeting.

As the ship sheered alongside in Kingston Harbour my wife and I in common with the other passengers leaned over the rail to watch the motley crowd upon the jetty. Prominent among them was a tall, handsome man in immaculate white linen and with French aristocrat written all over him. So plainly was it written indeed that he might well have been one of the guillotined *ancien régime* come to life again with his head replaced upon his shoulders. Hanging on to his arm was a fat negress in a satin dress no blacker than her face, and we had barely noted the grotesque incongruity of the pair before my wife's arm was gripped as though by a vice. She turned to find at her elbow

the girl from the Cornish vicarage, her face blanched to that tint of ivory peculiar to a dusky skin, and horror staring from her eyes.

“Oh!” she gasped, her face buried on my wife’s shoulder. “Oh! I never knew my mother was—as *black as that!*”

The tragedy of the thing haunts one. It was unwise to send her to England at all; to surround her for eleven impressionable years with the refinement and culture of an English home, and, when on the threshold of womanhood, to recall her to the semi-barbarism of a negro mammy and her family was stupid cruelty. Such tragedies have the same inevitable ending. On the isolated up-country estate to which she was doomed she would have as much chance of retaining the outlook of the vicarage drawing-room as a chorister would have of keeping his voice if apprenticed to a cheap-jack. The mammy with her sisters, her cousins, and her aunts would not derive the smallest benefit from intimacy with this lovely finished product of civilisation; she, on the other hand, would rapidly sink to the mental level of the negress who had borne her. It grips me to imagine those moments of poignant anguish in the future when she would recall her companions of the tennis parties and country-house dances in distant Cornwall.

CHAPTER XXI

Two Stage Plays and how they were Written.

“**P**ROPER PORE 'E BE, I RECKON. I've a-seen 'im settin' up there to 'The Keg' in a room with no paper to the walls, writin' with a feather!”

Such was a Cornish urchin's description to his mother of my whitewashed garden-study and the bowl of quills upon its table. I do not suppose that either he or any of his contemporaries at the Council school had ever heard of, much less seen, a quill pen. And I fear his young Nonconformist conscience would have been as shocked as his social susceptibilities had he known that I was employing the feathers in writing a stage play. Cornwall prides itself on its aloofness from the Devil and all his works, and there is not a single theatre in the county.

Like the majority of my adopted calling, I was bound sooner or later to catch the stage form of *cacoethes scribendi*. Some writers take the disease mildly, getting over it without permanent harm in their early literary childhood. Others develop a high temperature, and, after a riot of wasting fever, return to their ordained work chastened men and women. Others, again, have recurrences throughout their lives; but, whatever the result, it means an interruption to the even flow of letters. If only in the interests of booksellers—a quite inoffensive, self-sacrificing set of men—authors (apart from the strictly dramatic variety) should be inoculated at the outset of their careers against the stage bacillus. The Incorporated Society in Gower Street ought to make it a condition of membership.

Had I, like the complete shoemaker, stuck to my last, I am convinced that to-day I should have been standing on the Olympic heights with the gods and the Six Best Sellers. As it is I have loitered too long in stageland ever to be numbered with the happy half-dozen, and my first deflection from the publishing offices of Covent Garden towards the glare of the foot-lights was in the matter of *A Privy Council*, a one-act comedy written, on my return to Looe, round Pepys and his Diary. I took it to London, showed it to Mr. Cyril Maude, who hesitated, and to the late Mr. Frederick Harrison, who promptly accepted it and arranged for its early production at the Haymarket.

A few mornings later in Cornwall I opened my paper to learn that "the immortal Diarist" would shortly appear on the Haymarket stage in a new play by Major W. P. Drury and Mr. Richard Pryce! I rubbed my eyes. I had of course read with delight that shrewd novel, *Jezebel*, but what connection its author, then personally unknown to me, had with my play passed my comprehension. I caught the next Cornish Riviera express as the first obvious step towards solving the riddle. The answer turned out to be simplicity itself. Under the stethoscope the play had revealed a slight local weakness, for which the author of its being could readily have supplied the needed tonic. He was no farther away than Cornwall, it is true; but time pressed, and Mr. Richard Pryce, as a London practitioner on the spot, had been called in by Mr. Harrison. The practitioner's fee for his timely and skilful treatment was a Privy Councillorship, so to speak, and we have been joint-authors of the play ever since! But though I may now confess that I nursed a grievance against them at the moment, I count the loss of half my first laurel wreath as bagatelle against the gain of twenty years' friendship with such delightful personalities as Frederick Harrison and Richard Pryce.

The play ran for 150 nights at the Haymarket, has

since been revived, and is still—to the great benefit of its father and uncle, shall we say?—a prime favourite with amateurs. Quite recently it has been set to jovial music by Mr. Albert Coates, the world-famed conductor, so we may yet hear the amorous Samuel singing love songs (in his wife's absence) to Mistress Knipp of the King's Playhouse. For this version of the play Mr. Pryce has specially written in a charming little passage between the actress and the diarist, "to the great contentment," as Pepys himself would say, of the eminent composer.

Let me ring down the curtain on *A Privy Council* with the following instance of the risk a play may run from some trivial mishap. On the night of the production, during a supper scene, a capon was being carved. The bird, of course, was a property one; but since the company could scarcely be expected to eat painted wood and canvas, stuffing of a more digestible nature was provided. "Mr. Pepys's" knife slipped (the part was played by the late Sydney Valentine) and, in full view of the house, a sponge cake shot from the capon's interior into the middle of the orchestra. The audience chanced at the moment to be laughing at the general business of the supper, and no harm was done. Yet, trifling though it was, had the accident occurred in a more serious situation, it would probably have killed the play.

I had now tasted stage blood, and was out for more. It is true that I returned (with some reluctance) to the less exciting, if more assured, business of story-writing, and produced my sixth book, *Men-at-Arms*. But, much as I loved "The Keg" and my bowl of feathers, the stage drew me like a magnet, and my *Privy Council* experience had taught me how plagiarily far a cry it was from London to Looe. We therefore struck our tent, as it were, and re-pitched it in a little Sussex village—Graffham—between Petworth and Midhurst, and within comparatively easy reach of

Victoria. But before we left Looe—the General Election of 1906 was just over—my Radical opponents paid me the highest compliment of my life by burning me in effigy on the beach and scattering my ashes in the sea.

Shortly after we had settled down in Sussex, Cyril Maude introduced me to Major Leo Trevor, and suggested that we should collaborate in a naval comedy. I venture to think, indeed the event proved, that Maude's judgment in his blend of dramatists was a sound one; for the qualities I lacked, Trevor possessed, and *vice versa*. He had had a wider experience of the stage than I, and was already known as the author of such successful plays as *Brother Officers* and *Doctor Johnson*. He could write modern stage dialogue admirably, an art acquired only by long practice, whereas mine so far had been confined to the seventeenth century.

But—I know he will forgive me for saying so—he was weak in the invention and working out of plots, while I was a maker of stories, with first-hand knowledge of the Navy. This by no means implies that my plot of *The Flag-Lieutenant* was untouched by Trevor, or that he wrote all its dialogue. Each of us brought his own peculiar flair to the work, and we fortunately possessed in common that priceless gift—the sense of humour. It tided us over many a difficulty, and I am sure that my friend Leo Trevor will agree with me that our collaboration was in every sense a happy one.

To those apt to gauge the time needed for the writing of a play by that occupied in its performance it may come as a surprise to learn that *The Flag-Lieutenant* was eighteen months in the making. Most of the time we worked apart, Trevor at Richmond, I in Sussex, exchanging and pulling to pieces each other's manuscript till we were mutually satisfied. Occasionally we would forgather for a day or two and write at the same table, and there were many visits to the Playhouse for consultations with Maude. It was not until the early

summer of 1908 that we were all three agreed that the work was ready for rehearsal, a business that filled six strenuous weeks. Throughout the last fortnight we were from twelve to fourteen hours in the theatre daily.

But though we were reasonably satisfied with our work, we were soon to realise the truth that there is no finality in play-writing until the result has been tested on the stage itself, and not always then. The second act had not been an hour in rehearsal before authors, producer, and company all agreed that there was something wrong with it and that the entire act must be reconstructed. Leaving Maude to rehearse the others, Trevor and I departed; and under the trees of Richmond Park—it was a glorious summer—we tore up the labour of many weeks, buried it in a rabbit-hole, and set to work afresh.

For a considerable time Cyril Maude had had a run of unusually bad luck at the Playhouse, and it was generally whispered that *The Flag-Lieutenant* would make or end him. How much truth there was in the rumour I do not pretend to say. But I can testify that on the night of the production actor-manager, company, staff and stage hands alike were as nervy as patients awaiting the ordeal of the operating theatre. I always smile when the gifted amateur assures me that he or she is never nervous on the stage.

After the long tension, the reaction of the play's instant and tumultuous success produced behind the scenes something very like hysteria. In front the audience roared itself hoarse with enthusiasm, and for a long time the curtain continued to rise and fall in response to the applause with the monotony of a night advertisement. The comedy of course was admirably cast and staged; but I think its rapturous reception was chiefly due (1) to the fact that it was a clean, healthy play with a good story, and (2) to the truth of the naval atmosphere, which made every member of the

audience feel that, so far from being in a theatre, he was on board a real battleship and in actual contact with the officers and men of the Royal Navy.

The Flag-Lieutenant was played to packed audiences at the Playhouse for twelve months, while thirteen companies in all toured it in the provinces and various parts of the world. When the first of those companies was formed, for the twenty-three speaking parts we had over 1,300 applicants! A year or so later I saw the comedy in Bombay, and on landing in Plymouth it was being played there also. It was repeated for a short time at the Playhouse, and during the War was revived by Mr. Harrison at the Haymarket with an "all star" cast. It has been twice filmed, and is frequently performed by amateurs. The late King Edward and Queen Alexandra, his present Majesty, the Prince of Wales, and most of the Royal Family have witnessed the play at different times, and it has enjoyed the honour of a command performance at Sandringham. Incidentally, *A Privy Council* had previously been accorded a similar distinction. Trevor and I have not collaborated since, and neither of us off his own bat has achieved a second *Flag-Lieutenant*.

During the next four or five years, in the intervals of writing in Sussex, I spent much of my time in the London theatres, where I met most of the leading actors and actresses of the period. Soldiering and the fleet seemed infinitely far away, and there were occasions when I was very seasick—though not of course in the sense usually conveyed by the expression. Nevertheless, the change was a wholesome one. Though the Service outlook is in general as self-centred as that of the Stage, the two are widely sundered, and I can now appreciate both. The sailor and the artist still dwell in radically different worlds, and it has been interesting to live for a spell in each.

I was not hanging about the theatres for amusement.

In 1910 a one-act play of mine, *The Admiral Speaks*, was produced at the Comedy Theatre, and the following year was revived at the Court; while in 1912 *Calamity Jane, R.N.*, had a short run at the Globe. But the comedy which gave me most enjoyment (if little profit) was one called *The Playwright*, written round Bacon and Shakespeare for the express purpose of pulling the legs of the critics. It was produced at the Palace Theatre with Cyril Maude¹ as "Shakespeare" and Miss Winifred Emery as Queen Elizabeth (in a tantrum), and I heartily enjoyed the heated controversy in the Press as to whether I was a Baconian or a Shakespearian—especially as I didn't know myself! One critic played for safety by heading his article "Bakespeare at the Palace."

In 1911 Messrs. Chapman and Hall published my seventh volume, *Long Bow and Broad Arrow*, for I had lucid intervals in which I returned to the surer path of the story-teller. The three one-act plays above mentioned, together with *A Privy Council* and *A King's Hard Bargain*, have all been published by Samuel French, Ltd., and are in their well-known acting edition. They are constantly played by amateurs.

Of the stage celebrities I met in the theatre and at the Garrick Club (of which I was a member) I could tell many an anecdote did time and space permit. And though *un vieillard* may subscribe to M. Lenotre's doctrine quoted on the title page of this book, he should beware of falling into an anecdotage which wearies his audience and betrays his own senility. The late Sir Herbert Tree—who, in appreciation of a little speech I made from the stage of His Majesty's, gave me an autographed copy of his *Henry VIII*—was the subject of a hundred good stories, most of which are too well known for repetition. I wonder whether this is.

Walking into the Regent Street Post Office at the busiest hour of the day, he gently elbowed a passage

¹ Spencer Trevor had preceded Maude in the part.

through the crowd and planted his considerable bulk before the counter.

"Do you sell stamps?" he inquired of the harassed young woman who confronted him.

"This is a Post Office," she retorted; "of course we do."

"I should like to see some, please."

"Some what?"

"Stamps," explained Tree wearily. "I thought I'd said so."

"Well, what sort of stamps?" snapped the girl.

"Why can't you say exactly what you do want?"

"I'm trying to, but you're so cross," complained Tree. "I want some penny stamps."

"How many?"

"Oh," he vaguely indicated the contents of the Post Office, "lots."

With a cluck of impatience the exasperated girl thrust a shilling's worth under the wire netting. "Is that what you want?" she asked.

Tree reproachfully waved the proffered stamps aside.

"I wish I could make you understand," he sighed.

"I want lots more than that—lots and lots."

"Ten shillings," demanded the girl, pushing a sheet of 120 stamps towards him; "and be quick, please. I can't stay here all day fooling with you, and you're keeping everyone else waiting."

With extreme deliberation Tree adjusted his glasses, and, deaf to the growing indignation of the bystanders, bent in rapturous admiration over the sheet before him.

"Very nice," he murmured, his finger poised above it, "very nice indeed! I think"—the finger descended on the centre stamp—"yes, I think I'll have that one."

The following characteristic Tree story was told me by Leo Trevor, to whom my apologies are due for repeating it in print. Many years ago the great actor-manager lent His Majesty's Theatre for a charity *matinée*, the initial rehearsals for which he himself

conducted. At first he was not a little pleased to have so many beautiful and titled Society women on his stage. But he quickly discovered that the distinguished amateurs' conception of a rehearsal was a conference on frocks, varied by intrigue in the wings, and dominated by the clatter of teacups. He was only too glad therefore to hand the business over to Trevor, whose long experience with the famous Chatsworth theatricals enabled him to handle the butterflies with the deftness of the skilled entomologist. But even he could do little enough with them.

For some reason or other—a foreboding of the result, I suspect—he was not present at the performance. But entering the Beefsteak Club an hour or so later, he found Tree, a crumpled heap of despondency in a far corner.

“Well, how did the *matinée* go?” asked Trevor.

The great man slowly removed his hand from his forehead, and regarded his questioner sombrely.

“My dear boy,” he returned in a hoarse whisper, “the world has not seen such a tragedy since the crucifixion!”

CHAPTER XXII

Stage Misadventures. India—and the Inevitable Idol.

AN INSTRUCTIVE VOLUME might be written on stage mishaps, some ludicrous, such as the classic instance of the Ghost in *Hamlet* treading on a nutshell, others tragic, as in the case of the actor who was killed by a fellow player through the accidental use of ball cartridge in place of blank. Although, happily, I have witnessed no fatality in the theatre, I have seen many an amusing misadventure, one of which occurred at the Lyceum during a performance of Irving's *Dante*. The flames in the Inferno scene were realistically represented by coloured ribbons whirled by concealed electric fans. The device gave a wonderful impression of intense heat: actually the draught from the fans chilled the unfortunate "souls" in their flesh-coloured tights to the bone, and one of them sneezed! The humour of sneezing in hell convulsed the audience with laughter; had the incident befallen on the opening night it would have gone far towards killing the play.

Another *contretemps*, even more amusing for the audience though maddening enough for the actor concerned, I recall at one of the Shaftesbury Avenue theatres during a *matinée* of *The Speckled Band*. At the darkened close of the second act the Anglo-Indian doctor, who contemplates murdering his niece for her money by means of a snake-bite, brings the basket in which the cobra is concealed down to the footlights and sets it on the stage. Then, bending over it, and with a view to feeding the reptile, he softly

snaps his fingers till it lifts its hooded head above the rim of the basket, when the curtain slowly falls. It is an exceedingly effective piece of business, and never fails to thrill the audience with horror.

On the occasion I am recalling, the would-be murderer's part was played by Mr. Lyn Harding, an actor of great power, but a man who could suffer neither fools nor an implish fate gladly. The cobra's head appeared, but the curtain refused to descend. For several moments the actor continued to snap his fingers and smile malignantly at the snake; then, realising that something was wrong, he hastily glanced upwards at the refractory curtain, shot a murderous glare at the frantic stage-manager in the wings, and continued a finger-snapping that was fast becoming fatuous. Still the act-drop defied all efforts to move it, the audience was beginning to titter, and Harding knew that further delay would provoke it to disastrous laughter. Seizing the basket, he tucked it under his arm and strode up-stage, homicidal rage written in every line of his shoulders.

Meanwhile the stage hands, from whose view the proscenium was masked by intervening scenery, supposing the curtain to be down, as it should have been, had begun to "strike the flats"—in other words, to remove the back wall of the room preparatory to setting the next scene. Harding made for the gap; but through that gap the men could now see the proscenium, and, realising to their dismay that they were looking, not at the back of the curtain as they had expected, but straight into the auditorium, they hurriedly rejoined the separated flats an instant before the actor reached the opening. Unwittingly baulked of the exit he was so anxious to make, he had to blunder blindly round the stage till he found another, through which he disappeared at last to the clamour of a house rocked with laughter. I chanced to be "behind" that afternoon on a matter of business with my friend

Mr. Arthur Hardy, the producer of the play, and understanding how sorely such ridicule would wound an actor of repute, I was careful to avoid Mr. Harding as he stamped up and down the corridor, working off his very pardonable choler.

Although I have met many a woman "mistress of herself though china fall," I have rarely encountered an actor who could brook Misadventure's grin in the theatre with equanimity when he himself was its object. It is true that, substituting the quarterdeck for the stage, the same observation applies to post-Captains—perhaps, though I think in a lesser degree, to Bishops, Beaks, and Butlers. The alliteration recalls Mr. Arthur Bouchier, with whom I last forgathered in 1913 in the little municipal theatre at I—— in Yorkshire. He had been playing Trevor's comedy *Doctor Johnson*, and we were chatting in his dressing-room afterwards, when the electric light suddenly went out. At first the eminent actor laughed, but when not so much as a candle was brought to lighten our darkness he opened the door and shouted for the manager.

"What's happened to the light?" he thundered, when a scared attendant had produced the still more scared manager.

"N-nothing's 'happened,' Mr. Bouchier," stuttered the latter, with an obsequious smile. "You see, the Town Council insist on the lights being switched off as soon as the audience is out of the theatre."

I have seen Mr. Arthur Bouchier in many parts, but it is as "Doctor Johnson" in the dressing-room at I—— that I recall him most vividly. He was still in the make-up and costume of his stage character, and, in the dim light which filtered into the room from a passage lamp, might well have been the ghost of Johnson himself hectoring some impertinent ignoramus at the "Cheshire Cheese." "The audience!" he snorted, "and what about the artistes? Are they to have no consideration? Let me tell you, sir, that until

the management treats its visiting companies with the same courtesy it accords its audiences, no artist of repute will ever come to I——. You haven't given me time even to begin to take off my make-up! What are you going to do about it?"

"They usually light the gas," suggested the little manager deprecatingly. "There's a bracket over the looking-glass."

We all three struck matches simultaneously. Hanging down the wall at the spot indicated was a wreckage of gaspipe which suggested a strand of boiled macaroni.

"Dear, dear! I thought the plumber had seen to it," faltered the manager. "You know what plumbers are, Mr. Bouchier! It was like this. Last week we had Mr. Rutland Barrington here: he leaned against it——"

I thought of the great Savoyard's fairy form, noted the thundercloud on Bouchier's face, and—bolted.

Of the crowd of players whom I met in the course of business during those half-dozen years in London there is one to whose memory I cannot fail to pay a passing tribute of respect. The late Mrs. Cyril Maude (Miss Winifred Emery) was, as all the world knows, an actress of genius and of infinite charm. She was an artist to her finger-tips. Since she came of a family that has, I believe, been connected with the stage since the Restoration, she had the "sense of the theatre" in her bones. In the matter of the construction of a play I have rarely found the advice of a player of any value: it is a case of every man to his trade. Mrs. Maude was a notable exception. She never hampered the creator of the play with impossible demands, but, when her counsel was sought, and on those rare occasions on which she volunteered it, the event invariably proved her judgment to have been sound. I count it an honour indeed that so supreme an actress should have graced two of my plays; I count it an even greater honour that she should have found time,

in her drawing-room or in the theatre, to talk with me occasionally on subjects apart from the stage. She was in the highest sense of the word a good woman, and not only the stage, but the world beyond the play-house doors is the poorer by her loss. With the name of a very gracious lady on the page let me ring down the curtain on this period of my life "behind the scenes."

The period, as I shall now relate, had been broken by a voyage to India and back, for the *Daily Mail* had commissioned me to go out and write a series of articles on Indian unrest, at that time rather more insistent than usual. I seized the opportunity gladly enough, for the sea was always, and still is always, calling me to return to it. It was my first and last essay in journalism proper, though in desultory fashion I have written much at one time and another for the Press. But I lack the nimble pen of the journalist: the "copy" he would turn out in an hour would occupy me a week. The rapidity and punctuality demanded by newspaper work numb my faculties, and though the Indian articles were published in due course, I cannot flatter myself that they marked a new epoch in journalism.

The sea route to the East had become fairly familiar to me by now, but I contrived to recapture some of its early glamour through the enthusiasm of my wife, who accompanied me, and who made the Indian voyage for the first time. From Bombay we set out on a pilgrimage through the Punjaub, visiting most of the towns of Mutiny memory and visualising on the spot the scenes in that haunting tragedy. I doubt whether many people at home realise how oppressively the shadow of the Great Mutiny still lies upon Anglo-India. To us it is an episode of mid-Victorian history: to Anglo-Indians it is a nightmare of yesterday. Everything about them recalls it—the troops in church with their rifles and ammunition, the tablets on the walls

with their harrowing records of whole families butchered in a day. Apart from that sinister shadow, I retain two especially vivid impressions of India. One is of that exquisite tomb, the Taj Mahal, as I first saw it resting like a great bubble on the earth in the distant haze of a sweltering noon. The other is that of a faded wisp of bunting adroop in the orange moonlight from the flag-staff above the battered Residency at Lucknow. It is the only official Union Jack in the British Empire which is never hauled down at sunset. It and its successors have hung there, night and day alike, ever since the memorable siege nearly seventy years ago.

As I have before mentioned, my wife's godmother (who died when her godchild was a baby) had as a young woman lived through the siege. For that reason, perhaps, the story of the Mutiny had always thrilled my wife, and she regarded our tour through the Punjaub as the pilgrimage I have already labelled it. Among the rocks and scrub on the historic Ridge at Delhi we had stumbled on the grave of a young officer of the besieging force, and she had gathered and placed upon it a few wild flowers. She wished to repeat the little rite at that most sacred spot in all Anglo-India, the Well at Cawnpore, to which we were about to pay a flying visit from Lucknow. But as wild flowers do not grow in the city streets, I told our bearer to get the *mali* (gardener) at the hotel to cut a few white blossoms for the *memsahib* to take with her to Cawnpore in the morning.

Though I was careful not to suggest the reason, he knew only too well why the flowers were wanted, and both he and the *mali* entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing. Not only should the *memsahib* have something worth laying on the shrine, but all the world should see of what they themselves were capable. When the *ticca-gharri* drove up to the hotel entrance on the morrow to take us to the station, half Anglo-India seemed to have assembled casually on the

verandah. The publicity accorded our modest departure was embarrassing enough, but worse was to follow. Proudly borne across the compound by the *mali* and our bearer, in full view of everyone, came a funeral wreath as large as a cartwheel, which a barbaric potentate might well have hesitated to place on the Cenotaph. There was neither time to disown it nor room for it in the *gharri*. A second vehicle was hastily chartered, the bearer got in, and was buried under the wreath by the *mali*; and followed by the covert smiles of Anglo-India, we rattled down the avenue on the most painful lap of our pilgrimage.

“Play for safety where the gods of India are concerned : have nothing to do with idols if you can avoid it.” That wise counsel was given me—too late, alas !—by Mr. Rudyard Kipling, whom, on our return home, as will appear, I consulted in the matter of an idol and its accompanying peck of trouble. The story begins at a godmaker’s in the Bombay bazaar, where I rashly purchased a brazen image of that very treacherous lady, Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of fortune. I should have known the East better than to traffic in its deities ; still, the indiscretion is frequently committed, and mine might have passed without noticeably ill results. But, although (this side of Suez) I am the least superstitious of men, when I recall the sequel I marvel that the persistent bad luck which dogged our footsteps for the next year or two was no worse than it was.

A Hindu barrister, to whom our friend Mr. Justice Russell of the High Court of Bombay had introduced me, learning of my wife’s desire to see the interior of a temple, most courteously took us into one of which he himself was the principal pillar. The courtyard when we entered it was empty ; but the unusual admission of Europeans to a Hindu temple quickly drew a silent crowd so densely packed that on our exit we might have walked through the gates over a pathway of turbans. Even our host, head of his caste though

he was, had experienced difficulty at the outset in overcoming the scruples of the priesthood.

The *poojari* himself, however, was all salaams and affability, a mask which prompted my wife to show him, with the pride of possession, the idol purchased that afternoon in the bazaar. He took it from her, murmured over it a few words which she fondly took to be a blessing, but which I shrewdly suspect to have been the reverse, and returned it. He then did an incredible thing. On the altar stood the figures of the temple's presiding goddess, Lakshmi, and her two attendant deities, each with a wreath of jasmine round its neck. Stepping inside the rails, the *poojari* removed all three of the deities' wreaths and, with a profound salaam, presented them to my wife.

Whether our barrister *cicerone* concealed his surprise, or whether he was an accessory, I do not pretend to guess. But there was no doubt whatever of Mr. Justice Russell's amazement—an amazement that was shared by every other Anglo-Indian in Bombay who heard of the incident. Well, Nemesis was hard on our heels. The catalogue of the misadventures of every variety which crowded upon us from that hour would rival the Book of Job. Till then, to quote a single instance, I had had small difficulty in "placing" either plays or stories; both managers and editors now began to turn them down with an unanimity that grew monotonous. I cannot believe that my work had suddenly grown appreciably worse than it had been before I went to India; call it "coincidence" if you will, the fact remains that from the moment of our return the imp of adversity perched himself astride our roof-tree and defied every effort to dislodge him.

I forget whether it was the bursting of the kitchen boiler or the untimely demise of "Mr. Pagett," the terrier to whom we had given our hearts to tear, which in the end sent us across the county of Sussex to consult Mr. Kipling. We should have arrived by lunch

time, but as all four tyres *plus* the spare were punctured *en route* in wearisome succession, we did not reach *Bateman's* till the shades of evening were gathering round the old seventeenth-century house. Hospitable as our Stuart forefathers were, the Sussex ironmaster who built it could not have given his guests a warmer welcome than that accorded us by its present master and mistress; and over the teacups in the hall I presently told the story of the idol and the *poojari* to the author of *Kim*.

He listened seriously, if with a twinkle behind his glasses, and told me, as I had already told myself, that I should have known better. Where was the idol at that moment? When I said that I had left her sitting on the dining-room mantelpiece, he exclaimed with horror (a little feigned perhaps), "The room where the sacred cow is eaten! Don't go to bed to-night before you have removed her. And—get rid of her. I don't mean, of course, throw her away or destroy her: that would be asking for worse trouble. But just pass her on to someone else—not directly, which would mean shifting your bad luck on to other shoulders, but through a third person. As for the wreaths—burn them!"

I do not pretend, after the lapse of fifteen years, to record the great writer's precise words, but the foregoing was the substance of his counsel, which on our return home we made haste to carry out. The jasmine necklaces of the gods of India were committed to the flames in a Sussex garden; to the surprise of our chauffeur-gardener, I requested him to present the brass idol to his mother, an old lady I had never set eyes on. Within a week he suddenly deserted me for the service of a jockey who had bribed him with a princely wage, leaving me, in the absence of a substitute, to oil the car and weed the beds, jobs I especially abominate!

Evidently there was a snag somewhere in Mr. Kipling's

recipe. Then in a single day the persistent bad luck of two years changed. I had by now a plethoric basketful of rejected literary wares for sale, and in a final desperate effort to hawk them I took train for the metropolis. To my intense astonishment I was immediately and entirely successful, and on the return journey my wife, who had accompanied me, explained the reason. In turning over some trinkets the previous day she had opened a locket, from which had fallen a few dried and long-forgotten blossoms, relics of the vanished wreaths. Carefully wrapping them up with a link from a broken gold chain, a threepenny-bit, and a penny—the essential three metals—she had dropped the tiny parcel from the carriage window into the river as we crossed Pulborough bridge that morning. It is of course unnecessary to remind the informed reader of the geographical truth that all rivers flow eventually into the sacred Ganges. Childish superstition ! Perhaps. But the fact remains that on our return home the imp of adversity was no longer visible astride the ridge of the roof, nor has he, for any appreciable period, returned to it.



CHAPTER XXIII

Lord Roberts and the National Service League.

ABOUT THIS TIME—1909—in common with a few hundred other “cranks,” “militarists,” and “scaremongers” scattered up and down the kingdom, I had come to the conclusion that a conflict between this country and Germany in the near future was inevitable. My wife and I both believed (and still believe) in the strong-man-armed principle. Since it was the only thing we ourselves could do in that direction at the moment, we raised and trained in our Sussex village a Red Cross detachment and a troop of Boy Scouts respectively.

Sleepy Hollow woke up sufficiently to laugh at us before it turned over on the other side and continued its bucolic slumber. Ten years later more than one of the surviving scoffers asked me where I had obtained my early knowledge of the coming catastrophe. My reply that they might have gleaned a similar knowledge had they read the foreign intelligence in the papers as carefully as they followed the football results was received with incredulity. They could not believe that during those pre-war years they had lived in blinkers forced on them by politicians and a Radical Press. Incidentally several women of that village V.A.D. and all the Scouts played their part in the War, two at least of the latter—as a brass in the church tower testifies—falling gallantly in France.

One day a neighbour, prevented from fulfilling an engagement to address a National Service League

meeting in the district, asked me to take his place. I consented: for, although I had had little experience in public speaking, I was a whole-hearted believer in Lord Roberts and his scheme of universal training for national defence. My absolute conviction that war was coming and my reasons for that conviction impressed the audience; I was asked to speak in other villages, at more important meetings in country towns, my ring of fixtures ever widening through Sussex and Hampshire like the ripple spread on the surface of a pond by a cast stone. And that was the beginning of my connection with Lord Roberts's National Service League, of which I eventually became Chief Organiser.

At that date it had been some four or five years in existence, and had got well into its stride. But it was the leisurely stride of a man who deems that he has ample time to cross the street in front of a motor lorry, the speed of which he has underestimated. The pace of the N.S.L. was considerably accelerated before it reached the opposite pavement, so to speak, but at the time I joined it its progress was ponderous and unexciting. In a prosaic and unimaginative way it was well organised; it had branches in most of the big towns and very many of the smaller ones, whose paid organising secretaries arranged occasional lukewarm meetings. But to justify their secretarial existence they concentrated mainly on collecting subscriptions and sending the names of new subscribers—elderly ladies largely—to London. It was a useful enough objective as far as it went, but it cut little ice in the direction of persuading the manhood of the nation to put its shoulder to the gates, on the other side of which the enemy was already knocking.

Those early meetings were for the most part the dullest entertainments, apart from a modern revue, that I have ever attended. The local tin god in the chair would waste perhaps twenty minutes in cutting the

ground from under the principal speaker's feet before the latter had a chance of standing on them. Having thoroughly exasperated half the audience with a political speech (an opportunity too good to be missed), he would bore both halves with his own version (frequently incorrect) of "the aims and objects of the National Service League," which were then repeated at length and with the necessary corrections by the other bore. Both speakers would stress the need for subscribing to the League, but neither as a rule concerned himself overmuch to show why the need was urgent. The cart, so it seemed to me, was usually placed before the horse. My own practice was to paint a pre-Raphaelite picture of "the aims and objects" of Germany, for I felt that, before one could hope to get either money or service for national defence out of an apathetic, peace-softened nation, the first essential was to give it the creeps. There were, however, many brilliant men and women here and there speaking for the League, and the audiences were by no means always asleep. But the above is a fair description of the average N.S.L. meeting five or six years before the War.

After a considerable period, during which I spoke in towns as far apart as London and Plymouth, I was asked by the Council of the League to undertake a tour through Cornwall. This I did, addressing meetings at Wadebridge, Camelford, Liskeard, Bodmin, and Padstow. But, on learning of Lord Roberts's proposal that they should spend a few days annually in training for the coming war, Tre, Pol, and Pen stuffed their fingers in their ears, and in more than one case refused to hear me out. Radical and Nonconformist Cornwall, with the exception of a few purple patches, was pacifist to the lowest level of its deepest tin mine; it violently asserted that we had grown too civilised for war, that the solidarity of labour had made it impossible. Well, well: I returned to London with the parrot cries ringing

in my ears, cries I still recall each time I see the granite cross of a Cornish war memorial.

I was next asked to go to Dundee, where I spent a fortnight, addressing a meeting every night, sometimes two a day, either in that city of tall chimney stacks itself, or in its neighbouring towns and villages. As I rarely spoke for less than forty minutes and always from memory, the sustained effort was a strenuous one. It was my first experience of northern audiences, and, although they heckled me badly, I infinitely preferred their decisive disapproval to the non-committal attitude of Hampshire and Sussex. Whether marmalade is more conducive to clear thinking than mangolds, or whether it is a question of race and climate, I do not pretend to say. The fact remains that the Dundee audiences were far quicker in the uptake and readier with repartee than those of the south; they understood me better, though I was sometimes very far from understanding them. "What a pity Major Drury is so deaf," said a local magnate in my absence to my host. "Every question has to be repeated to him by the chairman." It was not the chairman's repetition but the translation that I needed! St. Paul doubtless suffered from a similar deafness when questioned by the "barbarous people" of Malta.

There are many interesting old country houses in the Dundee district, and Camperdown, the seat of the Earls of that name, held of course a special attraction for me. Castle Huntly, where I was most hospitably entertained by Sir George and Lady Baxter, and in whose haunted tower I slept, is one of those ancient strongholds where on windy nights history talks in the chimney and legend taps upon the pane. It was right that I should not see in my tower chamber the frail lady who, pursued by her dishonoured lord, had "once upon a time" clambered into its window embrasure and hurled herself on to the courtyard stones a hundred and fifty feet below. But (it being a gusty

night) I surely heard the rustle of her dress against the wall and the stertorous breathing of Sir Nemesis as he followed her up the turret stair.

And Glamis ! Architecturally, historically, psychically, a giant among pigmies, compared with whose stupendous "happenings," the tragedy of Huntly's haunted tower is small beer indeed. I first saw it, silent and lifeless—the family were away—through the heat haze of an August afternoon, as Lady Baxter motored us, a young soldier and myself, through the park. The gnome who opened the tower door might have come from the Brocken, the very hall smelt of ghosts. Our hostess being a friend of Lady Strathmore's and knowing the castle well, the housekeeper was only too glad to be saved the trouble of doing guide, and the three of us had Glamis to ourselves for the length of a summer's afternoon. We explored it from the dungeons to the leads, saw "Bonnie Dundee's" leather coat carelessly flung across a hall chair as though the jingle of his spurs had barely ceased ringing on the flags, played at trying to find the secret room, and finally had tea with the factor and his family in their house across the park.

With the father of the factor—or estate agent, as we in England more cumbrously term him—I had an interesting talk in a corner. He was a very old man, in his nineties, I think, with a wonderful charm of manner and a keen memory—a triple combination which has indelibly fixed him in my mind. There are two figures on life's stage whose talk especially attracts me—one, that of the ancient man with chin on shoulder about to make his exit, the other, that of the child full of eager questions after his recent entrance.

"Naturally," said I to my old host, "you would not answer any question about the legendary family secret even if I were impertinent enough to ask it. But would it be indiscreet to inquire whether there is any secret at all ?"

"Not in the least," he smiled in return; "it is perfectly true that there *is* a secret, and that it is only known in each generation to the Earl, the heir, and the factor. At the present moment four of us chance to know it, since my son has succeeded me in my lifetime. But I think it would surprise you to learn how grotesquely public imagination has exaggerated it. And the farther one gets from Glamis," he concluded, "the more ridiculous the story grows."

I had barely returned to London before I was again dispatched to Scotland, this time to Glasgow, to help in the organisation of Lord Roberts's great mass meeting to be held in that city some three months later. My mission was mainly propaganda work, and, apart from other activities, I gave a ten-minute dinner-hour talk every day for many weeks in the seemingly countless shipyards on Clydebank. By permission of the company concerned I would take my stand on a lorry or cinder-heap inside the dock gates, and harangue the men as they returned to work—very briefly sounding the war alarm, outlining Lord Roberts's scheme, and exhorting them to come and hear the "great little" soldier for themselves. My audiences were composed of some of the roughest elements in the kingdom; they held, in common with Dundee (and for that matter Sussex, Hampshire, and Cornwall), the rooted conviction that the solidarity of labour would prove an insurmountable obstacle to a "capitalist war"; they were hostile to any suggestion that they should train for a "capitalist" country's defence. Yet on the whole they were the best audiences I ever addressed. They listened with marked attention, asked intelligent questions, and, if they heckled, showed no unfriendliness to me personally. I was sent to them by "Bobs," and his was ever a name to conjure with.

There dwelt at the head of the Kyles of Bute a certain retired Colonel who had served with Lord Roberts on his famous march to Kandahar, and who, like his

distinguished Chief, was a man of few inches. The Field-Marshal wished his old comrade to command the parade of local Crimean and Mutiny veterans on the occasion of his visit to Glasgow; but, since the old comrade was a notoriously shy bird and extremely difficult to lure from his wild glen into the din of the city, I was sent into the wilds of Argyleshire to entice him with honeyed words.

The adventure, if comparatively short, lacked little in the way of variety. A train journey to Greenock, the passage of the broad estuary of the Clyde in half a gale of wind, transhipment to a river tramp that landed me on a lonely beach beneath a bell, and but two-thirds of my pilgrimage were accomplished. In accordance with instructions from the tramp I rang the bell, which was suspended from a mimic gallows—rang until my arm ached, rang with alternate arms, till I could ring no longer and the grinning ferry-man on the far side had finished his dinner. The transit of the loch effected, I settled down to what seemed to be an endless drive through the forest, till a final bend of the road brought me to my destination.

The Colonel—we will call him Wauchope, chiefly because in Army Lists and Directories his name figures at the other end of the alphabet—received me with the hospitality of the Scottish laird warmed by the freemasonry of the Service. He was alone, his “house,” as one respectfully terms her in India, being in London, and I think he was glad of my company. Though there were but the two of us to dinner, the piper played in the hall throughout the meal; and in the morning I was awakened by his music as, in accordance with the axiom that one should neither hear the pipes begin nor finish, he strode down the glen, circled the house, and melted away again into the distance. I think it was my love for pipe music, far more than my eloquence, which in the end brought my mission to a successful issue.

That delicious comedy of pawky humour, *Bunt Pulls the Strings*, had recently been produced at the Haymarket, and on the Scottish sabbath which I spent in the glen I witnessed one of its scenes all over again. After a mile and a half's tramp in the drenching Argyleshire rain (I was given to understand that it was a reasonably fine day) the Colonel and I arrived at the kirk, in the porch of which stood a table covered with a white cloth and bearing a flat almsdish of generous circumference. An elder stood sentry over the dish, a second elder watched the sentry, while the entire congregation, whose heads were just visible above the high pews, kept an eye on all three. As we dropped our bawbees into the dish the shoulders of the worshippers also appeared, an indication, I took it, of a tiptoe curiosity to gauge the value of our offerings. This simultaneous rise and subsidence of the congregation so exactly suggested a passing earthquake wave that I even hesitated for a moment to follow my host up the stairway to the family pew. Here we occupied the front seat ; behind us sat a retainer or two, including the majestic piper ; facing us was the one other gallery in the kirk, belonging, though empty at the moment, to the laird of a neighbouring glen. And so, in a feudal state Pepys would have loved, I covertly yawned through a sermon with more heads than those of the Hydra itself.

The little Colonel had stipulated, as a condition of commanding the veterans' parade, that I should "help him through with it." This I promised to do as far as my many organising duties admitted, and on the eventful morning I did contrive to snatch a few moments for a flying visit to the Town Hall, before which the veterans were nominally drawn up. I say nominally : actually the heroes of the Crimea and Indian Mutiny had by that time been reduced to a state of collapse by their temporary commanding officer. When the police had succeeded in clearing a passage for me through

the dense crowd with which the square was packed, the underlying pathos of the scene which confronted me on the far side of the cleared roadway alone checked my laughter. Along the entire length of the pavement before the Town Hall straggled the line of derelicts, some so old that they must needs sit on campstools, while granddaughters held umbrellas over them during a passing shower. Some leaned against pillars for support, others on sticks, a few on crutches, while all eyed with senile bewilderment the immaculately dressed, dapper little Colonel, who wrathfully strutted up and down before them. On catching sight of me he pointed to the clock above us.

“You are late, sir!” he thundered, to the grins of the crowd, and I felt as though I were a subaltern again being told off by the Adjutant. “I’ve had a devil of a time with the old fools. As soon as I get one flank of the line dressed, the other flank’s half-way across the road. Give me a hand with them, for God’s sake! Now then—’Tion! Eyes right! Pick up your dressing smartly and hold your heads up! Back a bit, Number twenty-three! Damme if the old dodderer hasn’t forgotten his number already!”

I realised that this show of ferocity was but a cloak to cover extreme nervousness, and between us we presently succeeded in ravelling out the tangle of nonagenarians, campstools, umbrellas, and granddaughters into the semblance of a straight line. Before it had appreciably wobbled “Bobs” himself happily arrived, and everything else was forgotten in the tumultuous outburst of his reception.

CHAPTER XXIV

In Yorkshire. Three Great Englishmen. A Dinner-table and a Garden Scene.

“**M**R. J. J. W.—, BARRISTER, said that Major Drury’s words were those of a fire-cater and scaremonger. He spoke of the inevitableness of war and at the same time ignored the historical instances of war being averted again and again. Arbitration was a stepping-stone to universal peace, and he (Mr. W—) believed that the intermittent scares as to the invasion of England by Germany were the mere figment of the militarist imagination. (Hear, hear.)

“Councillor J. A. G— said Major Drury was in a condition of nightmare. . . . He (Mr. G—) had an intimate acquaintance with Germany and the German people, and his experience convinced him that self-interest, the interests of commerce, and the solidarity of the workers of both countries were going to do more than universal conscription in assuring lasting peace. (Hear, hear.)”

I have often wondered whether the sapient lawyer and councillor recalled their jibes (which I quote from the *Grimsby County Times*) when, a year later, war was declared between Great Britain and Germany. They were retorts to an address of mine given at the Bradford Liberal Club, and I recall them here as being fair specimens of the type of criticism encountered from the human ostrich up to the outbreak of hostilities by those of us who urged timely preparation for what

proved to be the greatest war in history. The culpability of the politicians—professional and amateur—who publicly derided Lord Roberts's grave warnings cannot, I think, be exaggerated. His mass meetings at Glasgow and other big industrial cities, crowning as they did the years of spadework by his lieutenants throughout the kingdom, were beginning to arrest the attention of the nation. We noticed a marked change in the temper of audiences. The uncompromising hostility of earlier years was succeeded by an uneasy curiosity to learn more of the great soldier's proposals for facing the cataclysm he declared to be inevitable. The Quakers, for instance, who for years had stubbornly refused to listen to us, now invited us to debate the question with them. So widespread was this growing change of attitude that I firmly believe, had we been granted but six months longer, Lord Roberts's scheme of universal training for home defence would have been accepted by the country.

That it was not must be set down primarily to the discredit of certain Englishmen who, for political purposes, systematically insulted the greatest soldier of the age and up to the last moment assured their countrymen that they might sleep comfortably in their beds. It is incredible that Cabinet Ministers should not have known what was so obvious to thousands of far less well-informed men in the street. If, on the other hand, they did know the truth, it is even more incredible that they should have wilfully misled their fellow countrymen by concealing it.

A pitiable wretch is he
Who knows the truth and yet can silent be.

Yet perhaps it is most incredible of all that, in a matter of war, a nation should have listened to the honeyed assurances of politicians and turned a deaf ear to the warnings of the most experienced warrior in

the Empire ! Germany banked on our weakness. Had we been the nation in arms advocated by Lord Roberts, she would have hesitated to violate the neutrality of Belgium ; it is even conceivable that war might have been averted. It is certain, at least, that the country would have been saved the colossal sum expended on the creation of vast armies in a panic. Truly the politicians have much to answer for.

A year or two before the outbreak of war Lord Roberts and the Council of the League had begun to infuse new life into the headquarters organisation in Victoria Street. The older men, who for the best part of a decade had done good work according to their lights, and who had at least kept the ball rolling, were replaced or reinforced by younger and more enterprising spirits. The League was dozing, but the new men quickly shook it into wakefulness, with the result that the stagnant blood began to flow more briskly in its veins throughout the system. Its worn-out machinery was overhauled and brought up to date, old shibboleths were scrapped, new slogans adopted. A general reorganisation was felt to be necessary, and it was decided to begin by way of experiment with the two great industrial counties, Lancashire and Yorkshire. Lord Roberts paid me the compliment of personally asking me to undertake the latter.

I embarked on the task *con amore*, for from the moment I joined the League I had always held that new methods were essential and that a far more attractive appeal must be made to the nation. But I had no illusions as to the task being either a simple or a pleasant one. The long-established committees of the League throughout the three Ridings contained a large reactionary element violently opposed to any change in an organisation to which it had grown accustomed. And yet, if Yorkshire and Lancashire were to give the lead to the rest of England in accepting Lord Roberts's scheme, as it was hoped they would, drastic changes

in the old methods of appeal were imperative. To break up the committees, reorganise them on more vigorous lines, and eliminate, without alienating their sympathy and support, the reactionaries—many of whom were wealthy or socially influential people—was a task which demanded all the patience and tact of which I was capable.

The Sheffield Committee, a large and very important one, was especially difficult to tackle, and, in compliance with instructions from Lord Roberts, I sought the counsel of one who understood the idiosyncrasies of its members infinitely better than I did. I had never seen him before, and was a little surprised to meet a short, somewhat thick-set man with a rather straggling iron-grey beard and clothes which suggested nothing so little as what our ancestors termed “a man of fashion.” Yet *burra sahib* was written all over him, and the twinkle in his eye betrayed that sense of kindly humour which endeared him to all with whom he was brought in contact.

He listened with courteous attention to the story of my difficulties and dismissed it with a smile. “Call the committee together to-morrow evening,” he directed, “and I will come down and talk to them.” We chatted a little on general topics, and when I rose to go he accompanied me into the hall. A footman helped me on with my overcoat and opened the street door; but before I could reach the latter a hand was laid on my collar and my coat was vigorously brushed from behind. Turning to thank the man, I found, not the butler, as I expected, but my host, the Duke of Norfolk!

The following evening I walked with him to the hall where the committee awaited him. He carried no stick, preferring to stride along the pavement with his hands in his pockets or clasped behind his back. Instead of addressing the committee from the platform as I expected he would, on reaching the hall he strolled among

them, chatting, laughing, jesting, with a special word for each and a good story for all, till, sitting astride a chair and leaning his arms on its back, he cleverly brought the conversation round to the burning question of the hour. In less than ten minutes, and without having mounted the platform at all, he had converted the entire committee to the doctrine of reorganisation. And not, be it understood, because he was England's premier Duke: the shrewd Sheffield folk were little influenced by considerations of ducal or any other rank. It was the charm and tact of a magnetic personality which swayed them, and I understood why Lord Roberts had told me always to go in cases of exceptional difficulty to the Duke of Norfolk.

I think that the six months I spent in Yorkshire comprised the most strenuous days and nights of a life which has never been an idle one, and which has numbered two serious breakdowns from overwork. I lived much of the time in the train, dealing with correspondence and composing speeches. For, in addition to reorganising the machinery of the League throughout the three Ridings and moving a small army of speakers about the chessboard to meet our opponents' counter attacks, I was addressing audiences at garden parties and drawing-room meetings, in town halls and village institutes, from factory lorries and farm wagons, in the squares and parks of the big cities. But the fatigue of the journeys, the hostility of opponents, the strain of continuous effort were more than compensated for by the unbounded hospitality of Yorkshire country houses, of which I retain the pleasantest memories.

One of the most valuable assets in a public speaker, especially in the North, is the gift of quick repartee in dealing with hecklers. Two of us were addressing a large crowd one summer's evening from the steps of Leeds Town Hall, when my companion began to draw lessons from our unreadiness for the comparatively

recent South African War. "What do you know about it?" shouted an obvious King's-hard-bargain from the fringe of the gathering: "I was all through the Boer War."

"Were you really?" retorted the speaker, screwing his glass into his eye, and thoughtfully regarding the ne'er-do-well: "this is most interesting. Now I realise why we had so many 'regrettable incidents' in that campaign."

The crowd roared with delight; there was no more trouble with that heckler!

Among a hundred episodes of travel which crowded those laborious months, I recall a night at a country inn in the North Riding, where three of us forgathered after a big public meeting in Middlesbrough. Two of the trio, another retired officer and myself, had been chiefly concerned with its organisation, the third had been the principal speaker; and after dinner we sat on till the small hours of the morning discussing the European situation generally and the policy of the National Service League in particular. That third member of our party was a young man, whose fine fighting speech had greatly impressed me in common with the rest of the audience. He was—and still is—a man after my own heart, utterly fearless in stating unpalatable truths, contemptuous of political trickery, direct and forceful in speech, a patriot as far removed from the Jingo of yesterday as from the sloppy Internationalist of to-day, a soldier by tradition, and—given time to damp down the last leaping flames of impetuous youth—a potential leader of a nation. The bearer of a great name, he was a tower of strength to Lord Roberts and the League in the North, and so arresting was the quiet voice in which he talked of the coming Armageddon that it kept his two companions from their beds till nearly three in the morning. We all said good night at the foot of the stairs as the cocks were beginning to herald the dawn, and I have never

met him since. But he had occasion to write to me only a year or two ago, and he signed himself *Northumberland*.

My work in Yorkshire finished, I was appointed Chief Organiser of the League for the entire kingdom. When I was not at the London headquarters, where I met Lord Roberts almost daily, I was travelling all over the country, addressing audiences of every description, from the clergy in Cathedral towns to the stage hands of London theatres, from hunting-folk in the 'shires to the anæmic "intelligentsia" of socialist clubs in city slums. I learned much of life from all sorts and conditions of men, realising hourly the truth of the *tot homines* tag. If I dined with a duke one day, I had a pot-house pint and pow-wow with a radical dustman the next, and, for the most part, found each an excellent fellow in his own peculiar way.

From the fast moving diorama of that episodic stage of my career two scenes remain printed very clearly on my memory. I quote the description of the first from my own *Tales of Our Ancestors*.

"I see a dimly-lighted London dinner-table, round which are gathered a handful of men—some six or seven at most—in evening dress. They are all old, old men, one or two extremely old, and they are obviously soldiers. They are sitting over their cigars and coffee, and they talk in subdued tones, very unlike the usual after-dinner chatter. And, indeed, the occasion is not one for boisterous laughter. For that impressively quiet little group is composed of the last surviving officers of the Lucknow garrison and of the relief column, a rapidly dwindling band, who dine together once a year among the shadows, the spirits of their gallant comrades (one feels) all about them.

"They forgather—or used to forgather, for I doubt if any are now left—in the strictest privacy, no guest being admitted within the sacred circle. But, for certain reasons which I need not explain, I was honoured

some ten years ago with an invitation to join them—not at the dinner certainly, but for an ever memorable half-hour at the table afterwards ; and from their own lips, and in the restrained phrases of men accustomed to deeds rather than words, I heard the immortal tale of the siege in which they had taken part in their far-off youth.”

The other is a garden scene, the date Easter Day, 1914. My wife and I were spending the week-end with Lord Roberts and his family at Englemere, their home in Berkshire, and on our return from church he took us round the grounds, and showed us the many trophies of his campaigns—mainly guns—with which they were studded. “I think that is all,” he said at last, then hesitated. “No,” he added a little brusquely, “there is still another : I’ll show it to you.” Leading us through an opening in a little screen of rhododendrons, he pointed to a lonely gun, which stood on the grass plot in the centre. “Uncover the breech,” he said to me, turning aside, “and read the inscription to your wife.” I obeyed, and after the first few words realised that it was the gun beside which his gallant and only son had been killed in South Africa.

I think it was almost the last time I saw the great little soldier, and I always think of him as I then saw him, turning round, the tears standing in his eyes. I count it as one of the greatest privileges of my life to have known and worked for him ; one of its greatest honours to have commanded the platoon of Royal Marines at his funeral in St. Paul’s. The volume on my bookshelves that I value above all others is an autograph copy of his *Forty-one Years in India*, which he gave me and in which he wrote a charming inscription. I can hear him now telling to a spell-bound dinner-table and with complete self-effacement the thrilling story of the assault on the Kashmir Gate at Delhi ; I hear him, too, in the morning, whistling

IN MANY PARTS

about the house like a schoolboy long before anyone else is stirring. I am glad to think that I spent his last Easter on earth with him, for I hold in the deepest respect and affection the memory of "Bobs Bahadur."

CHAPTER XXV

"Back to the Army Again." The Funeral March of a Hero. War-Time Episodes. The Princess von Wrede.

WITH THE OUTBREAK OF WAR the work of the National Service League automatically stopped, and its ten years' existence came to an end. The politicians had won hands down, and hundreds of millions were spent in a panic creation of armies which, under Lord Roberts's scheme, might have been steadily produced for as many hundreds of thousands. Apart from the Navy and that small expeditionary force which, from lack of adequate support, was speedily reduced to a skeleton, the blow found us as unprepared as the most rabid pacifist and pro-German could wish. Even now only those who were in the inner councils of the nation can realise how appallingly near defeat in the early stages of the conflict the British Empire was.

Lord Roberts's first act on the declaration of war was to place the premises of the League throughout the kingdom, and such of its machinery as remained, at the disposal of the Government. His ten years' unceasing effort to rouse his countrymen from their apathy and incredulity being ended by the fulfilment of his warnings, he turned his attention to the welfare of the troops. Still a soldier in spirit if not in actual command, he crossed the Channel to visit his Indian comrades in the trenches, and, as all the world knows, died within sound of the guns. Not the least tribute to his greatness, perhaps, is the fact that, in spite of all the insults he had received from politicians and Press

alike, he never once stooped to the tempting taunt, "I told you so!" In the unruffled serenity with which he faced the impertinences of civilian critics he resembled Marlborough, and, like Marlborough's, his name will live in history when those of his most violent detractors have long been forgotten.

The small army of League speakers and organisers dispersed in all directions, and I have met no more than one or two of them since. The majority being Territorial or retired Regular officers, were recalled to their various units; the remainder joined up with the new armies or were otherwise absorbed by the vast war machine. Being fifty-three years of age in 1914, and a derelict still suffering acutely at times from the neuritis with which I had been invalided out of the Service, I was not very sanguine as to my chances of re-employment with the Colours. But deeming boldness the best policy, I volunteered for service with the fleet, on any front, or in any part of the world to which the Admiralty might choose to send me, and to my great delight I was directed to rejoin my old Corps at Chatham.

And so, thirty-four years almost to the day after I had first joined it, I found myself "back to the Army again." In a few hours I felt as though I had never left it. The same old blots and erasures on the same old official forms demanded the same old sanction of my initials before they could be "passed to you, please"—indeed, I marvel that I was not asked to initial one of my Subaltern of the Day's Reports that had been overlooked in the early 'eighties. Not even the greatest war in history could rob the gods of officialdom, Red Tape and Routine, of an appreciable tag of their time-honoured ritual. Which shows how true it is that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

My experiences during the war were those of the average "dug-out" of my years and disabilities, and they number few episodes worth recounting. One of

the few certainly is that which sent me one dark, streaming winter's day on a march through the khaki-lined streets of London. I was in command of a platoon of the Corps, and, for some reason I never learned, every soldier on duty that day carried ball cartridge. The platoon was composed partly of veteran "dug-outs," partly of raw recruits, neither of whom possessed more than a bowing acquaintance with the mechanism of a Lee-Enfield. The young officer with me suggested the expediency therefore of loading the rifles as far from the madding crowd as possible, and on detraining at Victoria I marched the party to the extreme end of the platform, where the wisdom of his counsel was speedily demonstrated. I have no doubt there is an invisible hole in the glass roof of Victoria station at this moment through which that unpremeditated bullet sped. But for the precaution, it might so easily have drilled its way through the waistcoats of a few intervening citizens of London.

The mournful pageantry of Lord Roberts's funeral moved me deeply, for the thought of Englemere in the bright Easter sunshine of that same year went with me all the way. His garden then was bright with spring flowers; now he was passing in the rain through streets lined by drab-or-grey-coated troops and packed with mourning crowds. Of colour there was no vestige, and over all the city lay a deep hush which held a hint of tears, of a great pride, and something, one would fain hope, of remorse.

The Marines were well placed in the procession, yet, so long was it, I never saw the gun-carriage at all. Once within the precincts of the city I was careful to fix bayonets, an act which caused much whispered comment from troops and crowd alike. Yet there must have been some among them who recalled the historical fact that the Sea Regiment, having been raised originally from the London Train Bands, has for two and a half centuries jealously preserved its rare privilege of

marching through the city with colours flying, drums beating, and bayonets fixed.

The winter of 1914 I spent for the most part in a hut on the shore of a creek of Portsmouth Harbour, whither I was sent from Chatham to command an anti-aircraft battery. That branch of warfare was then in its infancy, and my three guns suggested infants with the rickets. They were ordinary Hotchkiss Q.F.'s mounted perpendicularly for the occasion, and if, owing to their clumsiness, they were small menace to aircraft, they were fraught with grave peril to the fingers of the gun's crew who manipulated the projectile and breechblock in so acrobatic a position. We practised aiming at the seaplanes which continually passed overhead, and I received more than one cynical invitation from the airmen to fire on them in earnest. They knew as well as we did that with our makeshift mountings we had as much chance of hitting them as a boy with a catapult has of hitting a snipe.

My little fort was a weed-grown relic of those early Victorian defences of Gosport known as "Palmerston's Folly," and its garrison of twenty "dug-out" Marines was appropriately in the picture. In an idle moment I calculated that our collective years would exactly span the gulf of time which yawns between our day and Alfred the Great's, and that our combined weight equalled that of a steam-roller. Nor was the imagination of my ponderous gunners less materialistic than their avoirdupois. Armageddon might be getting into its stride across the Channel, but Armageddon was out of sight and hearing. What was very much within both was the sergeant-major's goose, fattening on the green inside the earthwork; and the nearer Christmas approached the deeper grew the interest in *anser moriturus*.

Yet even on the remote flats of Portsmouth Harbour the winter was not without incident. A great fire in the Dockyard across the water provided us one night

with a grander pyrotechnic display than was ever witnessed by a Bank Holiday crowd at the Crystal Palace. One of the old building sheds burned till, like a set piece and scattering sparks in every direction, it glowed, a network of red-hot girders, against the sky. There were whispers of incendiarism; and as the *Queen Elizabeth*, then secretly preparing for sea, was berthed hard by, there may well have been good reason for the whispers.

On another night a man was reported sick in one of the huts, and on turning out I found him so desperately ill that I 'phoned up to barracks for an ambulance. In due course the patient was removed to the R.M. Infirmary, and shortly afterwards I received a message to the effect that the case was one of spotted fever, and that the entire detachment was to parade at the Infirmary the first thing in the morning for medical inspection.

As we were in the act of falling in, an old soldier to whom I had granted a night's leave ("to soothe a dying brotherlaw's pillow") arrived visibly shaken by a grief drowned in beer. Since in the ordinary course he would not have gone on watch till that evening, he had counted on sleeping off his emotion in his hammock out of sight of unsympathetic superiors. His dismay at finding the detachment about to march can be imagined, for his legs were fast becoming uncontrollable: still, propped up by a couple of comrades, he contrived to compass the half-mile tack to the Infirmary without noticeable deviation from the course. Mechanical movement, however, was one thing, to stand motionless in line quite another. After swaying backwards and forwards for a time in an endeavour to keep his feet, he suddenly abandoned the effort, and, collapsing on the floor, gave an admirable imitation of the groans and writhings of the spotted fever patient who was being placed on a stretcher at the far end of the room.

So realistic was the old reprobate's acting that the

doctors, who had no time for a detailed examination, bundled him into the ambulance with the genuine case and dispatched them both to Haslar Hospital. According to the creed of the nurse of our childhood he should have been "struck like it" for mimicking the afflicted. Yet, by a miracle, he escaped the fell disease, though not the solitary and wearisome quarantine which long debarred him from "soothing dying pillows" in Portsmouth taverns.

While at "Pompey" I volunteered for a transport job in the Dardanelles. But on the eve of embarking with two other officers of the Corps the Admiralty decided to send naval officers instead, and the Marines were employed elsewhere. I was sent to Plymouth as Intelligence Officer on the staff of the G.O.C., to which work I was able to bring the experience gained at the Admiralty some fifteen years before. Under war conditions I found it interesting but heartbreaking. In the matter of suspect aliens my two colleagues (Gunner "dug-outs") did not err as a rule on the side of credulity, while in the same relation the Home Office resembled a rampart of cotton-wool which one could neither climb over nor burrow through in pursuit of the enemy within the gate. That the Hidden Hand was no myth, and that there was a powerful pull against us from within throughout the war must be the conviction of every intelligence officer who served during the period of hostilities. As a typical instance I shall recall as briefly as possible the notorious case of the Princess von Wrede, an irregularly naturalised French subject.

A lady whose husband was employed at the Passport Office in Bedford Square, London, chanced to stay with us for a few days in Plymouth Barracks. Her first question on arrival was: "What have you done with the Austrian Princess?" It sounded so suspiciously like a catch that I flippantly answered, "Not guilty, my lord." But I soon found that my

questioner was serious enough. Her husband, it appeared, had recently refused a passport for France—on grounds of undesirability—to a certain Princess von Wrede, who had thereupon betaken herself (via Folkestone, which she had been promptly asked to quit) to the Grand Hotel on Plymouth Hoe. She had already been there some weeks, it seemed, yet the local police had failed to notify the Intelligence Department of her presence.

That an “undesirable alien” of enemy birth and social prominence should have been allowed even to enter a prohibited area in war time seemed folly enough : that she should have been permitted to live without let or hindrance for a considerable period in full view of the activities of the second naval port in the kingdom was incredible. I lost no time in examining the Grand Hotel registers, which, as far as they went, fully confirmed my informant’s story. But there was one significant variation. The Austrian *von Wrede* had become, according to the registers, the French *de Wrède*.

My next visit was to the Central Police Station, where, as I expected, they knew as little of the presence of an Austrian Princess in our midst as I myself had known an hour before. There ensued—to employ the *mot juste* of the day—a flap, for in compliance with the law the lady should have registered at the station on arrival, and the police should have seen that she did so. The truth is that in the matter of the registration of aliens they were notoriously slack in the early stages of the war, though it is only fair to add that after the Princess von Wrede episode they quickly drew the net tighter and worked in cordial co-operation with us until the Armistice.

The following morning the Chief Constable, the two Scotland Yard detectives attached to the Intelligence Department, and I proceeded to the Grand Hotel and arrested the Princess on a charge of having contravened the Defence of the Realm Act by failing to register

with the police as an alien within a prohibited area. While the Chief Constable conveyed the lady to the Central Station in a taxi, the two C.I.D. men and I took charge of her possessions, which included many thousands of pounds' worth of jewels and a quantity of correspondence. The examination of the latter employed me during the remainder of the day, without, however, yielding much result. With the exception of a scrawl on a torn half-sheet of notepaper, it was all in French, most of it an interesting key to the lady's anything but cloistered life. Yet even to the practised eye there was no hint of espionage or code, nor did I expect for one moment to find it. The Princess von Wrede was far too clever a woman to carry incriminating correspondence about with her on her travels. Yet the cleverest women make mistakes, and the Princess made a big one in overlooking that torn sheet of notepaper.

Having been duly charged, and pending her appearance before the magistrates, she was permitted to return to her look-out on the Hoe, an added folly I was powerless to prevent. As I was prosecuting on behalf of the General, I employed the interval in looking up the lady's past with a view to discovering reasons—though one would have said they were obvious enough on the face of it—for removing her at least from Plymouth. I interviewed the French Secret Police in London, who knew the last word about her, and who were only too anxious to help me. They declared that she was not in reality the naturalised French subject she claimed to be, her naturalisation papers having been originally granted in error. They showed me a confidential document from their Government admitting the error, but directing the police to ignore it since it had been committed so many years before. I was therefore in the false position of knowing that this potentially dangerous alien in our midst was not a French subject, yet of being debarred from using the information. By

the courtesy of the French Government, however, one of their police officers was permitted to accompany me to Plymouth to give evidence of the woman's extreme undesirability whether in England or in France.

On the day of the hearing the Court was packed, the case having roused much local interest. The patience of the crowd, tiptoe with eager curiosity, was sorely taxed at the outset, for the magistrates in their room were absorbed in valuing the lady's jewels, while the Chief Constable was being no less dazzled by the lady's eyes in his. That she was still an attractive woman despite her fifty years there was no denying, and from the moment she entered the Court it was obvious that she had thrown her spell over Bench and Chief Constable alike. To be smiled upon by a Princess with jewels worth something like £30,000 was not an every-day experience with the worthy burgesses, and I quickly realised that they would not be easily persuaded to rid Plymouth of the gold showered upon it by this pseudo-French Danæe.

The proceedings were irregularly opened by the French Consul (an Englishman), who was permitted to address the Bench from the solicitors' table. After waxing indignant over "the persecution of a friendly alien by the military authorities" and eulogising a lady of whom he knew nothing, he picked up his hat and umbrella, pleaded a pressing engagement, and bowed himself out of Court. He had neither entered the witness-box, nor been sworn, nor been asked any questions. But he had made an excellent bid to prejudice his audience from the word "go" in favour of the smiling lady by his side.

After accepting the statement of the latter's solicitors that their client had as a foreigner committed a technical error in ignorance, the magistrates drew their heads together to consider their judgment, and I realised that they intended at most to let her off with a fine. I crossed the Court to the Chief Constable and reminded

him that I had not yet given my evidence on behalf of the Military Authorities. "We shan't have to trouble you, Colonel," he smiled behind his hand; "the magistrates have already made up their minds, and they don't want any more evidence." "They may not want it," I retorted, "but they've got to have it. I have material evidence you and they know nothing of; if I don't go into the witness-box there'll be the devil's own row with the General."

The threat gave him pause, and he reluctantly informed the magistrates that there was yet another witness. At first, on the plea of having heard enough, they refused to listen to me. Then, influenced I think by a *crescendo* of indignant mutterings at the back of the Court, they consulted with their Clerk, and I was accorded a grudging permission to enter the witness-box. Whereupon, having (unlike the Consul) been duly sworn, I proceeded to unfold the dramatic story of the Princess von Wrede.

CHAPTER XXVI

A Scrap of Paper. "Soldier an' Sailor Too." An Invitation to Dinner. A Stage Whisper.

BORN OF HUMBLE PARENTS in the south of Austria, she was married to a Pole when the Prince von Wrede loomed on her horizon. Her beauty lured him no less than his wealth and position attracted her. On the plea that she, a Catholic, had been married in the Greek Church, an annulment of the ceremony was obtained from the Vatican, and in due course she wedded the Prince. But they had not reckoned with the Pole, who, so far from taking the matter lying down, carried it to the Courts of Appeal in Paris, who upheld the original marriage. Legally, then, the *soi-disant* Princess von Wrede remained the wife of the troublesome Pole. As he was never a naturalised French subject, it was in law impossible for his wife to have been one. This was the source of the "error" admitted in the confidential report to which I have referred.

"The lady," I continued from the witness-box, "has been represented by the French Consul and her solicitors as friendly to France and to England. Let us see how far that claim is supported by the facts. In going through her correspondence after her arrest, I came across this scrap of paper"—I held it up—"which Madame forgot to burn. It is written neither in French nor in English, but in *German*, and the writer, an officer of the Prussian invading army in 1914, thanks Madame for her hospitality to him and his comrades at her villa of *La Ferté* in northern France during the

German advance. 'It was pleasant,' he adds, 'to come across a German house in France.' "

For a moment the Court held its breath at this unexpected revelation of Madame in her true colours. Then the tension broke. The Princess and her solicitors sprang to their feet in angry protest, while the crowd sniggered at the obvious annoyance of the magistrates, who preferred the honeyed words of the French Consul.

"It is a lie!" cried the lady, apoplectic with rage. "It is all lies!"

"La Ferté," I continued, ignoring her outburst, "is, I gather, still available for Madame's hospitality——"

"This is hearsay evidence," interrupted one of the Bench; "you have not been there yourself."

"I have not," I admitted. "But by a curious coincidence there are at the moment two wounded officers in separate hospitals of this garrison who, at different times, were billeted in La Ferté. Each is prepared to depose on oath that the one untouched house in that hideously devastated area is the villa of the Princess von Wrede, the loyal friend of England and France!"

The Chairman checked me by a sign while he held a whispered council with his colleagues. "We do not wish to hear any more," he announced at length. "All this evidence is irrelevant to the case and quite uncorroborated."

I replied that I was on my oath, and that every word I uttered was corroborated by the documentary evidence before me, which I proposed to hand in. I submitted that the evidence was relevant as showing the strong potential danger of the presence of such an alien within a prohibited area; and I informed the Bench that, by the courtesy of the French Government, an officer of their secret police had travelled specially from London to give evidence against the Princess von Wrede.

The magistrates refused point blank either to read the documentary evidence or to allow the French detective to enter the box!

By this time the Court was in an uproar. The lady and her solicitors were voluble with rage at the unexpected turn the case had taken ; the public, unrestrained by the sanctity of a law court, and resentful of the magisterial attitude, loudly clamoured for the rest of the story ; even the stolid police were muttering their disapproval of the bias with which the hearing was being conducted. As I stood in the witness-box waiting the issue of events the scene reminded me of a trial in a pantomime.

"Am I to be allowed to continue ?" I inquired at length.

Public feeling was so obviously with me that I was enabled to proceed with my evidence, which contained the statement that the Princess's daughter was the wife of Von Bissing's Chief of the Staff—Von Bissing being, of course, the German Governor of Belgium. "And the Princess von Wrede," I continued, in effect, "living unfettered in Plymouth"—she had lunched certainly once on board a warship in the harbour—"has been, by permission of our Foreign Office, in direct communication with the German Chief of the Staff's wife in Brussels !"

The Bench imposed a fine of £5 and permitted the lady to return to the Grand Hotel upon the Hoe !

It all seems incredible now. It seemed so incredible to the Princess von Wrede at the time that, on hearing the magisterial decision, she exclaimed with a sigh of relief, "Five pounds ! Here are twenty for your poor-box." I did all in my power to have her evicted from Plymouth. Either the G.O.C. or the Chief Constable could have done so by a stroke of the pen. I could persuade neither to act. Nor was an interview with the Tin Gods in London any more successful, while my own Intelligence colleagues in Plymouth laughingly prophesied (and rather hoped, I think) that I should "burn my fingers over it." The truth is they were all afraid of the woman. "Better let it

go no further," counselled the General himself, "she has some very influential men behind her." She had indeed—one of the most influential in France to my own knowledge. "With all respect, sir," I returned, "I should have thought the present an excellent opportunity of returning the lady to her many admirers."

For several weeks longer she remained in her eyrie on the Hoe, laughing at us in her sleeve and doubtless noting a hundred things for the benefit of Frau Whatever-her-name-was in Belgium. When presently it suited her purpose (oddly enough *H.M.S. Warspite* had just secretly left the harbour) she removed to Hanover Square, London—a false move, for it gave me the opportunity I wanted. I took twenty-four hours' leave and had a heart-to-heart talk at Scotland Yard with that astute policeman, Basil Thomson, the first man I had met who was not afraid to act strongly in the matter. The Princess von Wrede vanished from our ken, and I heard no more of her for five years. Then one day I received a letter from my friend of the French Secret Police, now at Lyons. He informed me that the Princess von Wrede had just been re-arrested in France as an undesirable alien ; but, as the rest of his long screed was filled with reasons why I should get him an English decoration for his war-work in London, he presumably had no space for further details of the tempestuous petticoat which had at last swirled itself into the clutches of the French law.

Many of the actors in that discreditable case, including the Consul, the General, and the Chief Constable, are now dead, and out of regard for their memory I have refrained from mentioning names. But I have recorded it as a warning of the follies we are capable of committing even when our national existence is at stake. For in spite of the League of Nations (perhaps because of it) it seems probable that we shall again be fighting for that existence before the world is considerably older.

Investigation of reports of illicit signalling and of

the presence of foreigners took me constantly on to Dartmoor, where I spent many a long winter’s night, often when it lay deep in snow. On one occasion, in quest of certain information, I visited Princetown Prison, disguised as a Conscientious Objector, a rôle I found very difficult to sustain. On another I was reported to the Scotland Yard Police, with whom I was working, as “a suspicious-looking foreigner, who spoke English fairly well.” After a time I was transferred—for anti-submarine work—from the staff of the Garrison Commander to that of the Naval Commander-in-Chief.

I suppose no one but a “soldier an’ sailor too” could have been possible for both jobs. At Admiralty House we recorded in small red wafers on a huge chart each U-boat devilry round the British Isles as the news reached us. By a study of hours and dates we were often able to guess the exact position of some particular boat, and, by means of wireless, put our nearest destroyer on her track. The red spots increased appallingly, till the chart—which I had the honour of showing to the late American Ambassador, Mr. Page—suggested an epidemic of chicken-pox. We also interviewed many of the survivors, and now and then the Eddystone Lighthouse keepers. The tales of contrasting barbarity and heroism that we recorded would fill a dozen such volumes as this.

There was a certain wise old counsellor who had honoured me with his friendship, and to whom at this time I always turned for advice in cases of exceptional difficulty. He had a profound knowledge of men and affairs, was a courtier whom Queen Victoria had held in high regard, and a great gentleman in the highest sense of the phrase. I refer to the late Lord Mount Edgecumbe, whose unfailing courtesy and kindliness endeared him to thousands. He was in frail health, and, as the event alas proved, fast nearing his end; yet, whether in his garden chair or in bed, he was seldom

too tired to see me when I needed his advice. That advice not infrequently clashed with my own views, and more than once I was tempted to reject it. Yet I invariably found in the end that his wisdom was greater than mine, and that I should have made a false move had I not taken his counsel. He loved a good story, and it was understood between us that after our serious talk I should tell him the latest. It was with genuine sorrow that I soon afterwards saw him laid to rest among his ancestors in the little churchyard on Maker Heights.

A colleague of mine at Admiralty House, the Hon. Montague Eliot (a brother of the Earl of St. Germans) deserves a word of gratitude in passing for the delightful wit with which he has brightened many a weary journey taken in his company on the King's business. I still cherish the following invitation to dinner in a handwriting that recalls an Elizabethan manuscript:—

When will you come and break bread with us ?
 When will you crumble our crust ?
 We have a sheep that is dead with us,
 And a hen that has bitten the dust.

Untaught by experience, I was now repeating the folly of nearly twenty years before of "burning the candle at both ends." In addition to my Intelligence job I was editing the Corps Journal, a monthly periodical on which I often worked till two in the morning. I also produced my eighth volume of short stories, *All the King's Men*, and I was running the barrack theatre. This delightful little model of a West End playhouse I organised on the strictly professional lines dictated by my London stage experience, and for two years, with scarcely a break, I gave the officers and men who were continually passing through barracks two variety performances a week of the highest standard I could compass. But the combined strain of all these activities proved too much for me, and I had a breakdown which

brought me as near the brink of the River Styx as is possible without actually slipping in.

I recall one summer's afternoon when my wife, the doctors, and the nurse stood round my bed without much hope that I should live another hour. It was very still, for all drills and bugle calls had been stopped on the parade beneath the open window of the quarters. I was conscious of much gold lace about me, for a Surgeon Rear-Admiral (Sir Humphrey Rolleston) bent over me, and Surgeon-Captain (now Rear-Admiral) E. Penfold, D.S.O.—to whom and to my devoted wife I, humanly speaking, owe my life—stood on the other side of the bed. In the doorway loomed, indistinctly to me, and (I am told) with tears in her eyes, the farmhouse figure of Louisa, our Devonshire cook.

I think I was too ill to have any feeling of fear, though I recall a faint, rather pleasurable, curiosity as to what was going to happen when I had quite finished sinking through the bed. But I was far too weak to care very much what became of me, and I feebly resented an attempt to settle me in a more comfortable position on the pillows.

There came a stage whisper from the doorway.

"I 'mind nursing an old gentleman once," confided Louisa, "who was so heavy to turn in bed that we 'ad to take a crowbar to 'im!"

I instantly decided that it was worth living a little longer in a world so full of humour.

* * * * *

Since then, among other things, I have written four books, studied the organ for a season under Mr. Reginald Waddy, F.R.C.O., of Plymouth, painted in Italy, journeyed a thousand miles up the River Amazon, and lost the sight of an eye. I cannot complain that my life has lacked variety.

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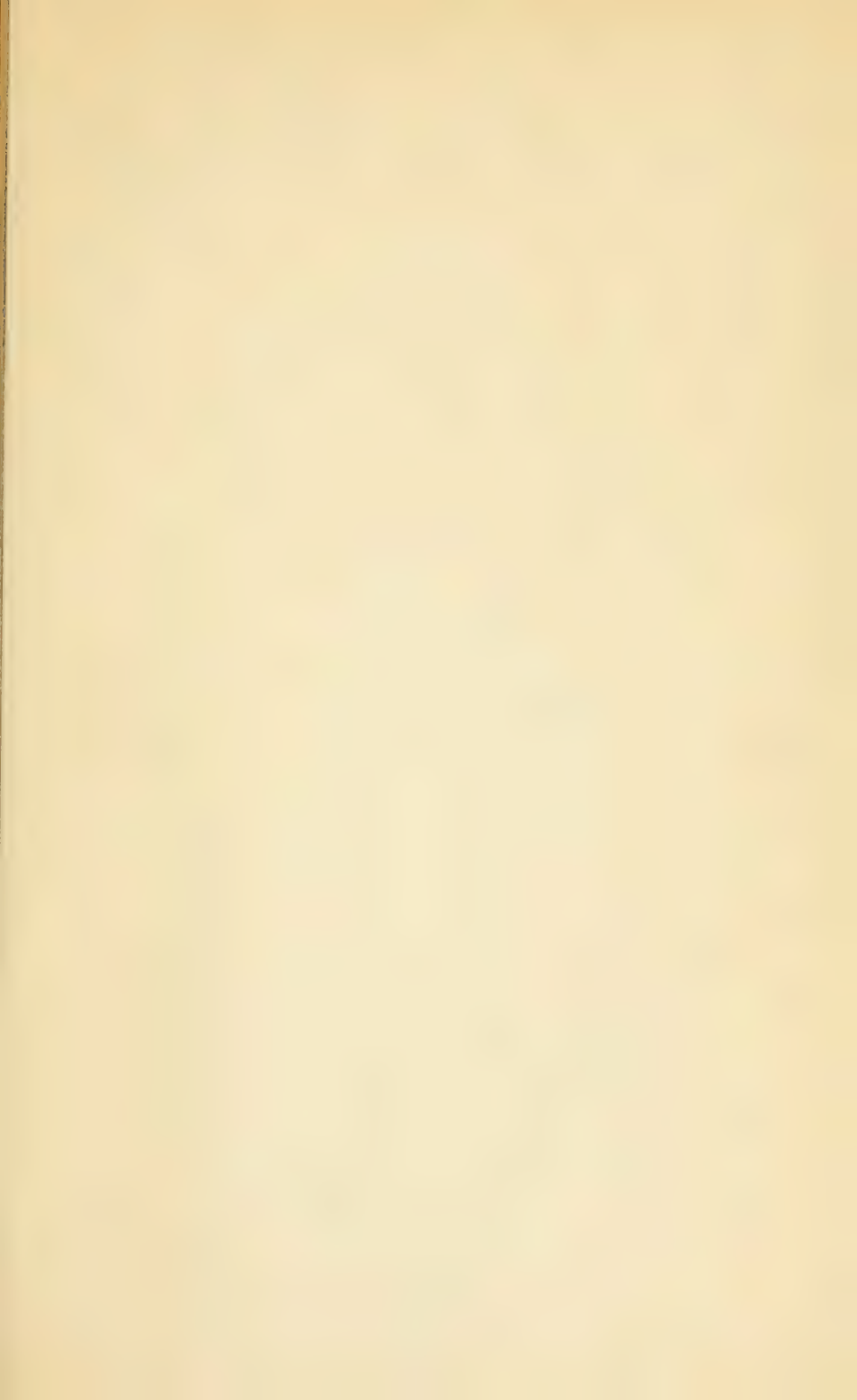
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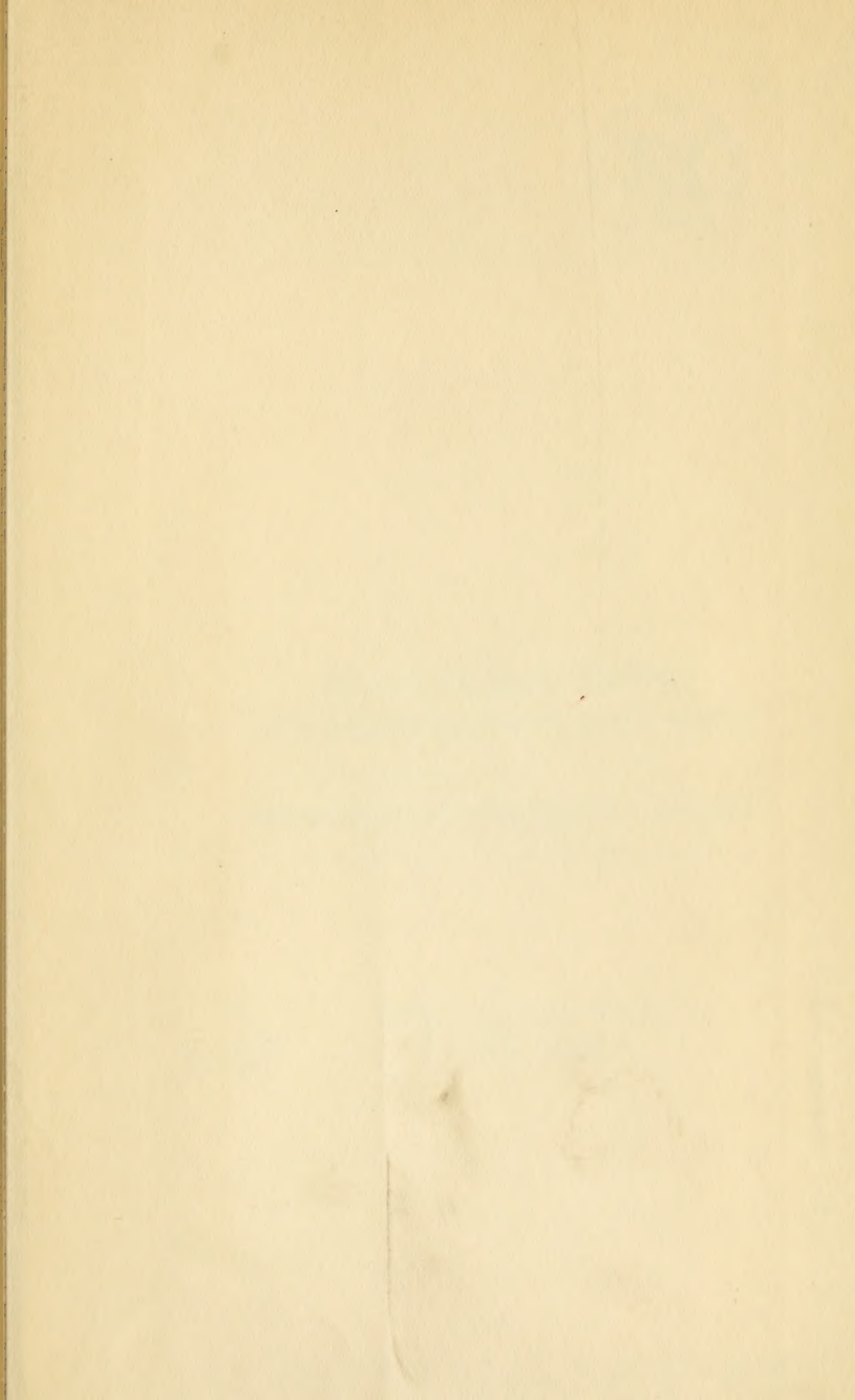
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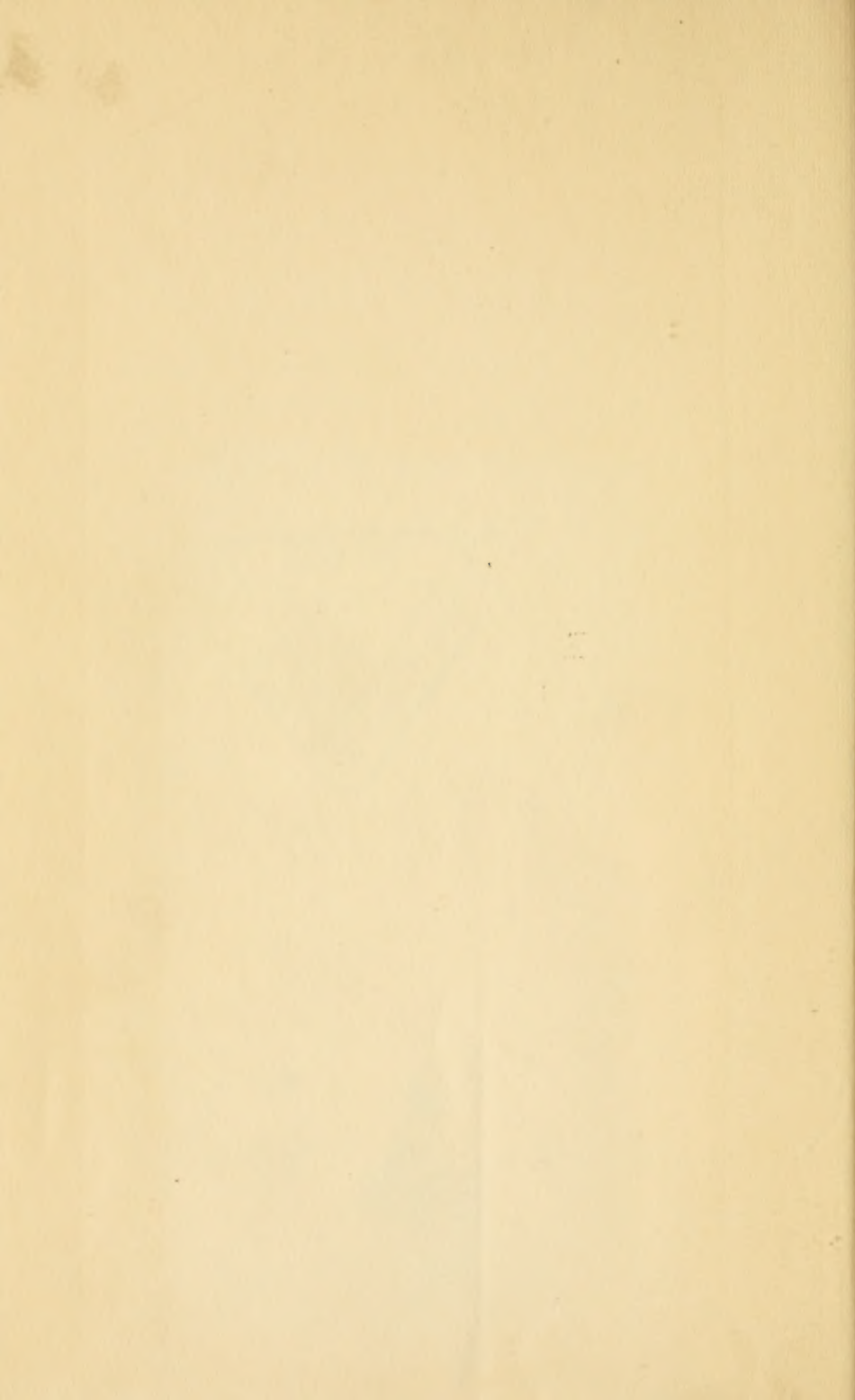


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